

Politeia

By Jonathan L. Wright

NOTE TO THE READER: This manuscript was found in the desert some time ago. When, after much difficulty, the authorities deciphered the text an exhaustive effort was made to find the people and the city described herein. Neither has ever been found.

--J.L.W.

PROLOGOV

There was Politeia. And there was nothing but Politeia. We had never ventured outside our borders whether in body or in mind. That will explain my difficulty writing this. We crossed the last marker some thirty miles ago and haven't seen another human being since we left our homeland. Our food supply is about to run out, and, even though a few of us are farmers, we find ourselves in a land only as completely barren as it is completely alien.

So I have taken a few shards of paper, and what we have left of our ink, and, with the consent of my companions, determined to write down what has happened to us in the - perhaps vain - hope that it will ever be read, so that our deaths, and our lives, will not have been in vain.

My name is Klinias S-112263. If I knew you or you were speaking to me casually you would just call me Klinias. But for official purposes it is, was, the protocol to call me Klinias S-112263, there being scores of people in my country, living and dead, known to their friends as Klinias, but only one ever having that number. There was some debate, before we left, that as time went on we would have to start recycling old numbers or create a new system. But now...well, I digress. It seems so hard to say how all this started. It seems equally difficult to try to explain the Institutions of Politeia to someone unfamiliar with them. Only a handful of Politeians have ever actually met an outsider, and they were strictly forbidden from talking about what they saw in detail, lest our Institutions be endangered.

Perhaps it would be best if I gave a preliminary description of our Institutions before I begin my narrative. Politeians, like all humans, presumably, are born. Whenever a new Politeian is born, usually around the summer or winter equinox, he or she is put into the care of the Guardians of the Children, under whose charge they will be until they are at most twenty one years old. All Politeian children are raised together until the age of three, whence they graduate into their second period and are divided into two groups, living in two separate facilities. Depending on the nature of the child as determined by the authorities, he will either learn to perfect the Silvian or Argentinian language, and know the other one secondarily.

At the age of seven the two classes are divided again. The one that primarily spoke Argentinian was subdivided into bronze and iron groups. The irons were sent out into Provincia, a large agricultural area that surrounds Politeia like a "C". There they were taught to become farmers and supply the city with bread, vegetables, and poultry. Provincia was too small to support any major livestock, so most of our meat was poultry or seafood. The irons were also taught their last language, Ferrian, which any Citizen was allowed to learn but few cared to.

The other class, the bronzes, were kept in the city, where they were taught carpentry, blacksmithy, architecture and other arts that would be beneficial to Politeia. In both of these cases their education ended at the point when the Guardians felt their students were advanced enough in their assigned specialization as to warrant their final graduation into Citizenship. At that point the young man or woman would leave his or her Specialized Training Facility, STF, and go to live in the nearest Residential Facility, RF, for the rest of his or her life. When they died, typical life span being sixty to seventy five years, their bodies would be ceremonially burned at one of the Palaces for the Expounding of the Doctrine, along with all the other Citizens who had died the previous day. Their ashes would then be taken to their assigned place in the Garden of the Fallen.

For the group that began to learn Silvian at age three life was much more complicated. I should know, I was one of them. This group was regarded as “superior” to the others, in the sense that they had more “virtue” or self-control, and thus were better suited to rule the city. This should not be taken to mean that they were favored by the state, or were entitled to “have” more things than the others. On the contrary, everyone was equal in Politeia, and nobody had any material possessions. Politeia’s Institutions had been designed to pre-empt such possibilities -- everyone had been assigned to their correct station in life, the station most fitted to their temperament, as defined by the authorities of Politeia.

I apologize for digressing, but I felt that somebody would need to know the above if he or she was going to properly understand the role of the golds and silvers. At the age of seven the group that spoke Silvian as its first language was subdivided into two classes – the golds and the silvers. Those who were found to be golds were, theoretically, the most virtuous, self-depriving, and loyal of all the seven year olds in the country. They were, as far as could be determined by the elder golds, the “best” spiritually, intellectually, and athletically. And thus, if Politeia was to be the best state possible, the best possible men and women must rule it. So twice a year, at the summer and winter equinoxes, the living golds would come together and select their eventual successors from the pool of Silvian speakers who were coming of age. From that moment on those little boys and girls were destined to rule Politeia.

During their training the young golds were given instruction on how to run the state, the different administrative and legal procedures, how to conduct the affairs of the various boards and commissions and things of that nature, but most importantly they were instructed in the Doctrine. The Doctrine is the fundamental set of principals from which our Institutions are derived. I don’t have time now to go in to the subtleties of the Doctrine, but for any person to become a Citizen, especially a gold, they must be convinced that the Doctrine was as correct as possible. They were also thought the Aurean language, the official language of Politeia, a tongue which only golds, or the most necessary silvers, were allowed to learn. (Incidentally, Politeia was only the Aurean name for our country, but I use it now as the common reference when one is communicating with foreigners, which is a rare occurrence to say the least.)

The elder golds don’t believe that Politeia is yet perfect, for that to happen the Doctrine must be absolutely correct; this is why the founders of Politeia established the Institute for the Study of the Doctrine, the ISD. Golds best suited for that kind of work are assigned there, where they work on finding the Ultimate Form of the Good, from which knowledge they hope to correct the Doctrine of its imperfections, and thus make our Institutions as perfect as humanly possible. In the meantime the Expounders of the Doctrine are sent there for training, and on the fourth day of every week, they Expound the Doctrine to the Citizens of Politeia. However most Politeians are content to know that the Doctrine is as correct as possible right now, and that our Institutions are as perfect as yet humanly possible, and leave it at that.

Those whom the elder golds determined to be silvers were destined for a less grandiose, though no less important, function in Politeia. After the leadership positions were accounted for, the rest of the Silvian class would become silvers. Their role was to carry out the directives of the golds for the benefit of Politeia. From the age of seven until whatever time we were determined to be fit for Citizenship,

silvers were rigorously trained and tested, first to discover more and more specialized capacities for our service to the community, and later to carry these out. And that is, I suppose, I got involved in all this.

Throughout my life I had thought of my various graduations and experiences as a kind of natural process. I was born a silver, and, at three and seven, I found that out. I was born to be the Ad hoc Administrator for Agricultural and Provincial Disputes, and, in the course of my training, I found that out too. But my relatively peaceful life and secure notions of the world around me began to change, violently, beginning that morning I entered Politeia to report on my progress in the Ben-Shetal matter, so many months ago.

ACTA UNUM

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 1

I was asleep in my carriage when we came to the walls. The sudden stop, though, interrupted whatever pretensions of slumber I may have had. First I felt the horse stop, then my bronze driver got off his platform, rattling the whole carriage. I heard him yell out to the doorkeeper, something in Argentinian, but I was too tired to translate. Outside my window there was the green darkness of Provincia. Dawn was upon us and I could see the rays of the eastern sun peer over the outline of Politeia, as if the city itself was glowing. Outside not a soul crept, for it was too early for the irons to get up, and no one seemed to have any business outside the city today but me. So the walls were lonely, dark matter waiting for someone to sense them.

After he was finished hollering with the doorkeeper, Fredrik, my driver returned to the front platform, shaking the carriage just a little, and the great wooden doors began to creak open. A kind of preternatural expectation took hold of me, and bade me peer my head out of the window, so I could see the glory of Politeia in the morning. The road we were on, one of three that stretch from the Tower to the edge of the Western Forest, ran straight through the middle of Politeia, going east-west. The gate that I had just past was the furthest inland point in the city, forty miles; thus I had the opportunity to see nearly the entire city from the best possible vantage point.

Riding inland I could see that the sun had just risen over the Eastern Sea, putting the Politeian Fleet and the Great Tower in black outline. I could see bronzes setting up their booths, both on the ground and on the many overpasses that connected the higher levels of Politeian buildings above me. As I traveled along to the Chamber of Agricultural Disputes, I went under seven overpasses, filled with people and animals going through all sorts of business, two, four, six, and eight stories above my head. (The overpasses for the odd numbered levels were in the other direction, running parallel to Central Avenue, not over it.)

All the buildings in Politeia are made out of concrete, and nearly all buildings are physically connected in one way or another, so the city takes on the form of a single gigantic edifice. Like our Doctrine and our Institutions, the city itself was created to be the most perfect conduit for human happiness possible. And why change perfection? No building had ever been built or taken down since the Foundation of the city, and on only a very few occasions was anything significantly altered. In fact the only time the bronzes go to work on the form of the city itself is when they have to restore it to its original state, repairing some kind of inevitable damage. About an hour after I crossed the gate, my carriage arrived at Politeia Square.

"Klinias, we're here" Fredrik's voice came pass the carriage walls.

"About what time is it?"

"Oh, I'd say seven...thirty,"

"A bit early then. Maybe I should take a walk around the Tower, the Commission doesn't want to see me until eight,"

"I wouldn't want to do any thing that might make me late for the Commission, Klinias, you know how they are,"

I had no intention of following Fredrik's advice. I wanted to walk around the square in the nativity of the day, breath in its morning mist, something I didn't get a chance to do often. I opened the carriage door, yawned and took out my papers.

"Well, I'll see you the next time they send me out to Provincia, Fredrik"

"Hopefully, that won't be soon, Klinias," I grinned, knowing how much the city accustomed bronzes hate to go out into the country.

"Good bye, then"

"Good bye,"

The sun had risen, but only by a few degrees, creating a kind of pastel effect on the surface of Politeia. It was interesting to see the parallel between nature and the temperament of those who were out at this time in the morning – awake, but only by degrees. It is, for some reason, more invigor-ating to walk or even move when you've just woken up. Perhaps that's because you're fighting both your own inertia, and the residue of sleep at the same time.

As I loitered amongst the Politeian national monuments I was struck by the majesty of the Great Tower, which was in the very midst of the Square. The Tower was a twelve-story obelisk with the emblem of Politeia fastened to it that could be seen from any part of the country; its function, apart from being the epicenter of our society, was to always remind people of the unity and symbioticism of the different classes, each working together in their own capacity. The large emblem that it bared consisted of a gold ring standing upright, a silver ring horizontally dividing the gold one in half, and a bronze and an iron ring, which diagonally cross the whole on the right and left sides, respectively. The Tower was the largest building in Politeia, for none of the others were more than eight stories.

"Klinias, Klinias! What are you doing here?" Cassandra S-121337 had spotted me.

"Hi, Cassandra. The Commission on Agricultural Disputes wanted to know about my progress in the Ben-Shetal thing."

"But why so early? I didn't think that was even resolved yet,"

"It isn't, but yesterday Fredrik showed up, all the way by the Southwestern Borders, with an urgent message that I return. I packed my stuff, and have been in a carriage ever since 3:00 yester-day. I just left Fredrik a minute ago".

"Seems awfully strange. Ben-Shetal wasn't even very important was it?"

"All of our duties to Politeia are important, Cassandra. But you're right; it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to recall me in the middle of a mandate like this. I can't remember the last time that happened. Perhaps the Commission sees more to it than I do,"

"Anyway, I'm glad your back," Cassandra smiled at me.

"I'm glad I'm back too, Cassandra," She walked on to the Primary Educational Facility, where she was a Guardian of the Children. Though I never told anyone, Cassandra always had a weird effect on me. I felt different in her presence, calmer, more relaxed, in a way I could never explain. Now the reason seems all too obvious.

Soon it was nearly eight o'clock and I had to get to the Commission. I made haste past the Tower and up a wide flight of stairs that led to the Hall of Domestic Affairs. After passing several apertures, I finally came to the familiar entrance of the Chamber of Agricultural Disputes. Two silver guardsmen were stationed out in front of it, as per the ancient tradition that both golds and silvers were the guardsmen of the state, from all enemies, foreign or internal. But we had never faced those in real life.

"Hail, Politeia," I lifted my right arm and saluted the Emblem as I entered the Chamber

"Hail, Politeia," the Commissioners half-heartedly responded, apparently having just got up. One Commissioner was drinking a cup of coffee while another was yawning, loudly. The gavel sounded.

"This, the 1,976th plenary session of the Commission on Agricultural Disputes, will be brought to order. The honorable Commissioner Xenophon G- 103169 presiding," One of the guardsmen had stepped in to officiate the meeting.

"Thank you, Gaius," the guardsmen respectfully stepped out. "Alright then, Klinias S-112263, Ad hoc Administrator for Agricultural and Provincial Disputes, you were assigned two weeks ago to the Ben-Shetal matter,"

"Yes, I was sir,"

"And has the matter been resolved under your guidance,"

"Not yet, sir. I was given a one month mandate to observe, and report back my recommendations,"

"Yes, we know," a female Commissioner, Diotima, interjected. "But from what you have seen to this point, what course of action would you recommend." She seemed a bit perturbed at having to be there. Some of the other Commissioners shuffled papers around.

"Perhaps it would be useful," Xenophon spoke up, "If you refreshed our memory of the case, Klinias." Most of the Commissioners abandoned their papers and looked at me.

"Gladly, sir. As you know the coastal plain that runs twenty miles south of the city of Politeia, up to the Southern Ridge, is inhospitable for growing produce, so that is where the silvers raise poultry, mainly chickens, turkeys, and quail. For some reason, the quails and chickens born last year are more virile fliers than before, and what's more there is a surplus of them. Excuse the pun." The Commission didn't laugh. "Anyway these birds have taken to flying past the boundary of our poultry producing area, and into our fields for mating and nesting practices. This has decreased the quality of produce, and increased the labor of the farmers in the closest village, Ben-Shetal. Two-and-a-half weeks ago this led to fistcuffs between the poultry raisers, who had come to recover their stock, and the citizens of Ben-Shetal, so a Politeian Institutional Maintenance Force was sent in to keep order. And then, you sent me."

"Did you observe any fighting between the two factions while you were there?" Diotima asked.

"Thankfully I did not ma'am. Most Politeians, of any class, would not dare tempt the P.I.M.F.'s razors. But I did see the damage done to Ben-Shetals crop by the birds and it is safe to say that, between what they consume themselves and the time taken up to de-pest the area, they will have a significant negative impact on our wheat and calla flour yields next fall."

"So how do you recommend we settle the matter," Xenophon asked respectfully.

"Well, pending investigations into what made the birds such avid flyers all of a sudden, possibly a secondary investigation into last years corn yields, the most practical step, sir, would be to build a large fence in between the poultry raising areas and the wheat growing area, to keep the fowl from crossing over into the wheat fields." The Commissioner's faces' did not convey a sense of enthusiasm.

"That would necessitate co-operation with the Board of Urban Development,"

"Getting large numbers of bronzes outside the city is never easy,"

"And worst," Diotima nearly cringed, "We would have to send the Fleet ... Outside to get the necessary metals." Xenophon called the meeting back to order.

"Did you examine the other end of this problem, Klinias, the poultry raisers, is there anyway to 'clip their wings' so to speak." The whole Commission laughed at his pun.

"Well, getting them to slaughter a large number of birds before they are ready to be used will be difficult, sir. I wasn't able to visit their settlement in Ben-Ankara, to see if they were raising them any differently, so I can't..."

"Why didn't you get to Ben-Ankara?" Diotima asked.

"Well, because I was recalled early, ma'am."

"Don't be disrespectful Klinias," Xenophon commanded.

"I'm sorry sir, but we can't simply keep the P.I.M.F. in Ben-Shetal forever. And even if we do, it won't ease the tensions between the two factions, or increase Politeia's wheat yield. If you want to make sure this doesn't happen again, we need a barrier between the two areas to keep the birds out."

"Thank you for your input Klinias S-112263. We'll consider the issue presently. You are dismissed. Gaius will call you back in when we are finished deliberating."

"Thank you, sir" I walked out.

I walked hurriedly pass the apertures and Guardians, and soon exited the Hall of Domestic Affairs. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't help cursing the Commission in my thoughts. "Fools. Won't even build a simple fence because they don't want the Board of Urban Development stepping on their toes. Ahh ...well there's nothing I can do about it now." The day was now fully born, and the people around the square were fully awake, having had their coffee and breakfast. It was nearing 9:00 now, so I went over to the Western Face of the Great Tower, to hear the news.

"Five minutes! Five minutes! The news will start in five minutes." A crowd was gathering around the Tower, precisely as people were gathering all over Politeia, at twenty-five strategically placed points, to hear precisely the same news. The different bronzes had slightly different styles and modes of

delivering the news; in fact, many Politeians try to attend particular, favorite, orators, if they can. This sometimes bothered the High Council, as something that could invite change, pandering for audiences, etc.; but they eventually decided that, because every Politeian was so well educated in virtue, and since the news was precisely the same anyway, the harm that such competition could do the city was minimal. It is very hard to ban something that is popular.

“Hail Politeia!” the bronze orator enthusiastically began his speech.

“Hail Politeia!” the audience enthusiastically responded, giving the customary salute, which was a flat raised right arm with the four fingers outstretched, separated in the middle with two on each side, with the thumb inclined to the separation. The four fingers represented the four classes, and the thumb, their unity.

“First off, one of the Fleetships has just come back in from the Outside.” Well that grabbed the people’s attention – everyone leaned in, wide-eyed, to hear.

“Yes, the Fleetship *Argos* has just come back from its two month mission to attain some building materials. And while they were gone ... they anchored in a foreign harbor!” The audience seemed as captivated as children listening to a storyteller. News about the Outside always interested people. “The gold Fleet officers went on shore to speak with the port authorities and to buy the de-sired cargo. And when they got back on board and told the silver Fleetsmen what they saw, they all agreed – the foreign place was terrible! Some people were born with more possessions, some with less! People become leaders, or dignitaries, only by chance of birth or fortune! And very few of those who are born with, or rise to, positions of authority are qualified. They have little virtue or self-control, and hardly any have as much as heard of the Doctrine. Yes, all the Fleetsmen and Fleet officers agreed that it was much better to live in Politeian Institutions, were every possible facet of our national life has been designed to be in accord with virtue, and not left up to chance.”

Most of the audience nodded their head in unison, or else agreed with their eyes. Ideally iron, bronze, and most silver Politeians should never hear anything about the Outside, but the High Council realized this only enhanced curiosity about it, so now the Fleet officers are required to give analysis on the virtues of every set of institutions they encounter, from a Doctrinal perspective of course. Every time the Fleet officers found the foreign institutions to be deficient, once compared with ours.

“Secondly, Klinias S-112263 has been recalled to Politeia,” oh, great. “The erstwhile Administrator for Agricultural and Provincial Disputes was ordered back yesterday, two weeks into a one month mission to Ben-Shetal to end a feud between the Ben-Shetalim and the neighboring Ben-Ankarim.” Erstwhile? What did he mean by that? “Klinias’ early departure will mean that the feuding will sustain into the near future, and thus necessitate the P.I.M.F.’s continued deployment to the area.” “He was probably just making the problem worse,” someone snickered to himself.

“And, thirdly, a murderer was capture yesterday evening, and sentenced to death today,” finally lighter news. “Quintustaratius S-032763 will be executed for his crime against Politeia at 8:00 tonight on the roof of the eight story high Penal Facility. His death, thus, can be seen from most parts of the city.” S – that meant that a silver was going to be executed! By the Doctrine, I must have met him at least once. Someone tapped me on the back.

“Are you Klinias S-112263?”

"You know who I am, Gaius,"

"I know, sir, but you have to identify,"

"Yes, I am Klinias S-112263, what does the Commission want?"

"It wants you to come back to the Chamber at 1:00 today,"

"Good, that means I can take a shower and have some lunch,"

"Indeed, sir," Gaius turned to leave.

"Hey, Gaius," he turned his head back. "Do you know anything about that Quintustaratius fellow their going to execute?"

"I haven't heard about it."

The faucet hissed when I turned the water on. It felt good having the water pour on my face again. I hadn't had a shower since the day before yesterday, and then it was the iron shower at Ben-Shetal, which didn't have as good water pressure. Because it was the middle of the day, not many people were in there with me, just two guys at the other end of the shower room. RF-S4 itself, my Residential Facility, was pretty well deserted, except for a few bored RF Administrators; just about everyone who lived there was out on business. So I could pretty much stay under that faucet for as long as I wanted, and reflect on every thing that was going on. All of a sudden, I heard the outer door open. "Oh, no," I saw a shadow behind the glass inner door, taking its robes off, getting ready to come in. "I hope whoever it is won't berate me about Ben-Shetal"

The opaque glass doors began to part, and I could hear the bare feet of the intruder step in. Resigned to my fate, I sighed, and turned around to see who it was. Once I turned I saw the image of Diana S-083197 looking back at me. I was so relieved. Diana would never harp on me in the shower. The others acted in the way you'd expect when a naked woman entered a room with three naked men in it.

"Oh, hi Diana, what are you doing in here, at this time of day?"

"What's up, Di? They let you go early at the Board of Urban Development?" She strode up to the faucet next to mine.

"Hey, Klinias,"

"Hey, Diana," She raised her voice. "The B.U.D. didn't have any business until this afternoon, so I asked if I could take a shower before lunch."

"The C.A.D. let me off too. I don't have to go back until one."

"That's good. I heard they recalled you."

"Good news travels fast. They said they wanted some kind of emergency briefing."

"Did they tell what kind of emergency it was?" Diana seemed at least somewhat interested.

"No, in fact they kind of blew me off. Especially that Diotima lady."

"Diotima," her face nearly scolded. "Yeah, I think I know her, she's the one that acts as the liaison for B.U.D. She can be real territorial, can't she?"

"They all are," I turned towards Diana, and couldn't help but see her chest, decorated as it was with so many perfect little droplets of water. At that moment a thought took hold of me and forced me to ask something of her.

"Diana, could you tell me who this guy is they're executing tonight?"

"What?"

"This person they're executing tonight, Quintustaratius. He supposed to be a silver, but I can't remember ever meeting him."

"Quintustaratius, you know, when you mention it, I think I have heard of him. He was a member of the P.I.M.F. stationed at one the gateposts on the North ...western Border, I think. We had to communicate with him when the gate needed repairs."

"I wonder whom he could have killed all the way out there."

"Don't know, but he's gonna wish he hadn't at about 8:05 tonight."

"Huh," I turned off the faucet and grabbed a towel off the metal shelf. "Well, I'm going to the Cafeteria, will you join me in a minute?"

"Sure," I left the shower room and dried my self off in the antechamber. In retrospect, I think, the only thing that was stranger than what happened in Politeia, was what did not happen in Politeia.

It never ceased to amaze me how efficiently run our collective meals were. Just as I left the shower room dozens of others poured in from the long apertures that surrounded much of the cafeteria, like blood rushing from wounds. Without discussion we filed in to our places on the bench, the earliest taking the center-most place and then the rest gradually filling out the whole. Food was already on the table when I got there, having been prepared by the bronze chefs who occupied their own table, eating the food they had just prepared. I am always asked about the foods we will be eating, because I work for C.A.D. but I only know how food gets made, the distribution and rationing process is as alien to me as the Southern Ridge is barren. Today we had chicken, lettuce, and crouton salad, but, for the life of me, I couldn't tell you why. I did appreciate food more, though. I turned to Ironicus S-050685, and pointed to the chicken. "You don't know how much trouble that little bird is causing." He grimaced.

I finished my salad as quickly as I could, for I knew it would be a long journey to the Chamber. In fact I ended up finishing my meal before anyone else did, at about thirty minutes till one. I didn't even get a chance to see Diana; I guess she ended up eating at the end of a table, though, having just gotten to the sho-er room when I had left. In the metropolis, sleep was all but a dim memory, for the sun was now overhead, and the few who had reason to be out during the Noon Lunch Hour seemed as vital as the star itself. The mid-day sun brings vitality out in people, and things; the gray cement seemed to radiate white, and the sky overhead was more intrinsically blue, like my robes, rather than simply looking that way because of the sun. When I finally got to Politeia Square, I looked back, and gazed upon, the beautiful visage that was my country, Politeia.

The white buildings to my immediate left and right, south and north respectively, could only block the green fields of Provincia so far; from this vantage, Provincia was a huge misshapen wave, in the south only a small green line above the white buildings of Politeia, then thicker and thicker as my eyes moved southwest, until, finally, the light green expanse was directly ahead of me, as voluminous in sight as the white city in the foreground. Turning slowly north the almost pearl buildings got in the way again, but one could still see the Provincial hinterland beyond, twice as expansive as its southern cousin, because it went forty miles to the "cape." I paused to look forward, directly westward, again. I could see Central Avenue start at my feet, and travel single-mindedly through Politeia, past the gate, finally to the edge of the Western Forest, almost a pin now. Turning my eyes up from the road I surmised my universe one last time – pearly white city, living light green fields, dark green Western Forest rising up behind the gates, brown Southern Ridge to the south, steadily becoming less steep as it encompassed Provincia, fastening the Western Forest onto it, until disappearing into the Northern plain. And the east - what about the east? Almost surprised and embarrassed at my omission, I turned back swiftly. But all that I could see was the stern Great Tower, blocking any view of the eternal, empty blue sea that lay behind it.

"Klinias!" my meditation had already been broken by the Tower sneaking up on me.

"Klinias, I was just coming to get you, what are you doing?"

"Huh, oh, nothing Gaius, I was just admiring the view and the Tower an..."

"Well you can do that later. Right now you have your duty to Politeia. It's not like the Tower or the whole rest of the country are going anywhere soon."

Gaius escorted me through the Hall of Domestic Affairs, up finally to the entrance of the Chamber of Agricultural Disputes. Before they let me in, his partner stopped me.

"You are Klinias S-112263, are you not?"

"Haaaa, yes I am Klinias S-112263, we've been working together for seventeen years, Tiberius,"

"You know the rules,"

"I know, but I'm thinking of embroidering that number on my robe,"

"I don't think that's legal,"

"I'll bring it up with the High Council. Hail Politeia!" I'll never know if he laughed or not, because, as we talked, we entered the Chamber, and had to get down to the business at hand.

"This, the third meeting of the 1,976th plenary session of the Commission on Agricultural Disputes, will be brought to order. The honorable Commissioner Xenophon G- 103169 presiding," Tiberius stepped out.

I will not bore the reader with the details of this meeting. Suffice it to say that it took all my skill as a negotiator, at full strength, to hammer out an at least seemingly reasonable solution to our problem. The Commission would ask the Commandant of the P.I.M.F. for two more captaincies (sixty people) to carry out an expanded mandate in the Southwestern Borderlands. The P.I.M.F.'s new mission there would include de-pestation of the Ben-Shetalite wheat fields, and the execution of any bird trying to fly past its boundaries.

I tried to explain to them that a military solution to changing fowl migration patterns was misguided for several reasons. The average Politeian Institutional Maintainer does not know how to conduct oneself in a wheat field, and their large presence would inevitably mean crushed produce, thus alienating the Ben-Shetalim. Meanwhile the mass execution of live birds would alienate the Ben-Ankarites. Furthermore, the Commissions idea didn't go to the root of the problem, i.e., the feed and the virility of last year's birds. They agreed to send another ad hoc Administrator, Julius S-031544, to investigate the problem, but that was just a concession on their part to get me to sign the request to Commandant Pericles. I knew that the Com-missions program was so wrong, on so many levels, that I felt like a traitor to the well being of Politeia when I signed the request. Despite my misgivings, however, a refusal on my part to endorse the project would mean an appeal to the High Council, which could take weeks, cause irreparable harm to my relation-ship with the Commission (who often rewarded disloyalty with retribution), and in the meantime the prob-lem would go on unresolved. I had a practical duty to Politeia to implement a solution, no matter how flawed. As long as I live I will regret this decision.

The Plenary session finally ended at 6:00 pm. I was exhausted. All the vitality with which I dove into the meeting was gone. I pulled one leg in front of the other, moved my body along the diagonal street that led from Central Avenue to my RF. As soon as I entered, I made a b-line to the Dormatorium; the Dorm was the largest room in the RF, one and a half acres long and 30 feet wide, it housed five rows of beds, thirty beds each, each one perfectly in line. Most business had been done for the day, and the Evening Dinner Hour didn't start for about forty-five minutes, so most of the RF was hanging out in there, social-lizing. I walked up to my bed, old no. 17 row 2, where I had been sleeping for seventeen years, and let myself fall into its blue blankets and pillows. I spread out and relaxed, closed my eyes. Ones assigned bed was the closest thing to a personal possession one had in Politeia. It was assigned to you once you graduated into Citizenship, and it could never be taken away from you, or changed, or have any one else sleep in it, ever.

"Klinias," I opened my eyes. Sometimes the worst sound in the world is your own name being called.

"Klinias, I got some good news for you," it was one of the RF Administrators. "You've been chosen to represent RF-S4 at the execution tonight!"

"Uugh," I lifted the upper part of my body from my bed.

"What's wrong? Don't you want to do your duty to Politeia?"

"I've been doing my duty to Politeia since 7:30 this morning, I missed the Morning Breakfast Hour, I had to cut Lunch Hour in half, and I've spent sixteen of the last twenty four hours in a carriage..."

"I, I, I, mine, mine, mine, it's not about you, it's about the well being of Politeia, and it is for the good of Politeia that each RF has witnesses to each execu..."

"It's also for the good of Politeia that its agricultural officials eat dinner and get a full night of sleep!"

"Leave him alone, Icarus," my friend Megilus S-080290 interceded. "Klinias here has just gotten back from Ben-Shetal, he's been with the Commission all day, and I second his objection to being sent."

"Thank you, Megilus,"

"Anytime,"

"Well, then," Icarus looked personally insulted at having his message rebuffed. "You will have to come before the Administrative Council to have your case heard,"

I looked at Megilus. Megilus looked at me. We knew what we had to do.

"I, Klinias S-112263, hereby delegate my responsibility, ad hic re, to my friend, Megilus S-080290."

"And I, Megilus S-080290, hereby accept," Icarus suppressed a snarl at having the absolute authority over his little fiefdom threatened.

"Come on, then!" he stamped out of the Dormatorium, with Megilus in tow. Megilus turned and grinned at me behind the RF-Administrators back, knowing they couldn't send him in my stead because the execution would already have a full P.I.M.F. detail.

Evening Dinner Hour began at seven. Again the population of Residential Facility Silver Four moved out of its hiding places and congregated upon the lettuce, chicken and croutons laid out for us in the Cafeteria. Again I didn't know why, and didn't know what we would have tomorrow, but was sure there was a valid logistical reason for both. The flow of people was more monolithic now than at lunch, nearly everyone coming in from the Dormatorium. I enjoyed Dinner Hour much more than my mute and rushed Lunch Hour. I now had time to enjoy both my food and my company.

"I wouldn't worry too much about it, Megilus, only some farmers with pitchforks,"

"They're really going to send us out there to kill birds?"

"Yeah, unless the Commandant vetoes it. But him and Xenophon are mutual friends -- neither one obstructs what the other does. That's why whenever the C.A.D. needs anything, it relies on the P.I.M.F. instead of risking it with another agency."

"It's the same song over at B.U.D." Diana was sitting by us.

"The Chairman of the Board is also a Fleet officer in the Maritime Nutritional Fleet." The M.N. F. was the bronze fishing agency.

"Anytime they request additional work on their Fleetships, it is approved without question. But if the Politeian Fleet or the Bureau for Urban Transport and Transmissile ask for repairs on their equipment, it takes at least three days to decide whether we will even consider the case."

"The Secretariat on Education doesn't do that," Cassandra's gentle porcelain voice spoke up defensively, and quite innocently.

"That's because it is its own complex of organizations," Megilus leaned over and rebutted Cassandra. "You have the Commissariat on Bronze Tertiary Education, the Commissariat on Silvan Secondary Education, the ones for the specialized phases, and you don't really need anything from outside your little state within a state."

"That's not true," Cassandra used her teacher's voice. "The higher phases especially need co-operation with the other Agencies to apprentice the students."

“True, but they have to work with you. The Agencies are required by law to help bring up the people who will work for them in the future, and eventually replace them. How else do you think people come to be in the positions they are? They are brought up to the place that best suites their nature.”

“Don’t you need materials, even for your Primary Educational Students?” Diana came to her fellow females defense.

“Yes we do,” Cassandra was enthusiastic about the implicit suggestion. “We use cribs for the very young, beds for the older ones, behavior enhancing medicine, even specially made Doctrinal Instruction books from the Institute for the Study of the Doctrine. And we never get into any disagreement with the agencies that provide these things.”

“Even the Institute for the Study?”

“They’re the most eager of all,” Cassandra proclaimed triumphantly. Megilus seemed impressed by this last part. The ISD was usually thought of as a secretive, cultish organization, which took its responsibilities to guard and enhance the Doctrine very, very seriously. It was almost humorous to think of them in connection with two year olds.

“Well maybe you haven’t seen anything in the Educational Secretariat, Cassandra. Anyway, I wish the Commandant would find real enemies of Politeia to fight, not just this guy!” Megilus held up a piece of chicken and everyone laughed.

I laid awake in bed for a while that night. The dark blueish haze of the night sky shone through the long horizontal windows near the ceiling of the Dormatorium. I could not help picturing in my mind the scene I had avoided. “Quintustaratius S-032763, you have been found guilty of murder.” So the chief Institutional Maintainer says. Poor Quintustaratius stands there, nearly naked, the cold cement at his bare feet and back, the unforgiving night above him, the half alive stars struggling in the distance. The soldiers and witnesses around him not so vitally awake as in mid-day, but keen to see their macabre purpose fulfilled, if only by their grim determination.

The chief Institutional Maintainer reads again “And because an act of aggression on any Citizen of Politeia, from any source, is an act of war on Politeia itself, according to the Book of Nomoi chapter 27:8-15,” He used the Aurean name for our book of the laws. “You are to be executed as if you were an enemy in a declared war.” He looks up from his decree, to the condemned himself. “May you take comfort in the knowledge that your death will be a benefit to the well being of Politeia.” The chief signals the order with his arm, and two P.I.M.F. soldiers walk up to Quintustaratius. They stand on either side of him. They put their long ax-like razors up to either side of the condemned neck. The chief gives a last signal. They push their weapons into the man’s neck.

CHAPTER 2

I woke up to “good” news. As soon as I was able to pull my eyelids apart the little yellow paper clipped to the side of my bed peered down at me. Without reading, I knew what it meant. “Sure am popular lately.”

“What’s this?” as Diana walked by she casually slipped the yellow paper from its clip on my bedpost; the question was only rhetorical, though.

“It’s a notice from the Bureau for the Propagation of the Species. They want me to come to their Facility after the Expounding. It’s going to take all day, by the Doctrine. Wednesday is supposed to be our day off.”

“It is, that’s why the B.P.S. schedules these things for Wednesday afternoons; they know you won’t be busy, I got one too.” She handed me my card after turning it around awhile, non-chalantly.

“You know why they’re doing this, right? I didn’t witness that execution last night. It’s Icarus’ petty revenge.” Diana sat on my bed, her lower body becoming adjacent to my legs under the sheets.

“Oh, don’t give Icarus a hard time. He’s just trying to do his duty to Politeia like all of us. Besides, I think the Bureau plans these things out long in advance. Might even be the reason you were recalled early.”

“I doubt it. I remember reading somewhere that Administrators can’t be taken from their work in order to perform Species Propagational Activities. In fact, come to think of it, I would still be within the window for the winter solstice Birthing Season if I had came two weeks later. So it can’t be that.” We were in the middle of the Spring Propagational Season. The future Citizens conceived now would be born nine months later during the time of the Winter Birthing Season. Similarly, the future Citizens conceived during the Fall Propagational Season would be born in the Summer Birthing Season.

“Hhmm” Diana got off my bed and started walking toward the Cafeteria. I started to reach for my clothes when she called back “Oh, and one other thing,” I turned back towards her. “What are we having for Breakfast today?”

There were four Palaces for the Expounding of the Doctrine in Politeia; four large pyramidal build-ings that every Citizen of Politeia, of every class, must report to every Wednesday at 8:00 am. For two hours each week bronzes did not work, silvers did not serve, golds did not govern, but all sat together to listen as the wise Expounders preached the virtues of the majestic Doctrine for the people. The gates were opened and, for the only regular time, irons were allowed, indeed, required, to come into the city to take the seats nearest the Expounders themselves, for, as it was thought, the least virtuous in our society needed the Doc-trine more than anyone else did. Whole columns of red lined the three paths into Politeia, some coming as far as forty miles away, just to hear the Doctrine Expounded. (The really far off villages start the journey the previous evening.)

As soon as it was 7:30 the silvers in the Cafeteria, with one mind, but without co-ordination, began to stand up and walk out into the street, all heading in a single direction. As our blue worm felt its way through the city it was joined by other masses of people, brown, yellow, blue and red robes all

struggling to enter the Palace. The antechamber of the palace was like the blacksmith who hammers out impurities in a metal, for as the eclectic crowd streamed through, it was filtered. Golds walked into their entrances, and silvers, theirs. People entered the right entrance by habit and tradition. Nobody had to be directed.

Once each class was situated the Expounders began to officiate today's service. "Will you all rise, please, and salute the Emblem as we sing the Politeian National Anthem." It was a majestic sight to behold as hundreds of right arms across the vast auditorium pointed in unison to the large emblem that was fastened to the wall behind the Expounders, and, led by a single male voice in the chorus, we all sang,

Hail Politeia, land of glory and awe

Oh, Politeia you are the strength of us all!

Oh, Politeia rising up from the sea,

Hail Politeia, may thy always be!

Hail Politeia, rising up from the earth

Oh, Politeia glorious land of our birth!

Oh, Politeia may your Institutions always exist

Hail Politeia, always striving for our benefit!

Hail Politeia, golden minds did create

Oh, Politeia who controls our fate!

"Please, be seated," the congregation obliged.

"Thank you. As many of you have by now realized we are in the midst of the Spring Propagational Season. It occurred to me that those who will be born as a result, will be the most blessed people the world has ever known. For it is here, and only here, that all a person's life is planned to ensure the greatest possible happiness for that person, and all the people around him. For it is here, in Politeia, that we are guided by the Doctrine, the highest achievement man's mind has ever created. For isn't it reasonable, that for someone to live the best kind of life, he must live under the best kind of Institutions?"

"Yes, that seems reasonable," the congregation responded in unison, referring to a passage in the Book of Nomoi.

“And isn’t it reasonable that the best Institutions must derive from the best sort of thinking?”

“Yes, at least that is what we think,” a girl got up from the iron section and scampered out of the Palace. I thought nothing of it because that happened all the time. She was probably sick or something.

“And so the best thinking creates the best laws, eventually the best people and the best state. My friends we are that state, and we are that people. We are constantly advancing to the most perfect state of affairs possible, and no other state is even on the road.” Some silvers got up and hurriedly exited the balcony, but I was listening intently to what the Expounder was saying, so didn’t really notice.

“We live in the most perfect society on the face of this planet. Everything, down to the last detail, is designed for our benefit. And it is all thanks to the Doctrine. It is because we are guided by the Doctrine that we don’t need to build any more buildings. It is because of the Doctrine that our carriages are the most efficient land transportation possible.” Some more people, bronzes this time, left the Palace. “It is because of the Doctrine that our music, written down in the second Book of Nomoi, is the sweetest sound that human ears have ever heard.” I could hear a buzz start to go around the auditorium as more and more people started to whisper to each other about something. More and more chunks of people began to leave the Palace to investigate something outside.

“Every Politeian devotes his life to Politeia. Every Politeian devotes his life to the goal of creating the highest state of human existence on earth, in Politeia.” Now the buzz and the commotion became a disturbance. As the original knots of people left, the ones near them began to wonder what had happened. Soon, people started streaming out of the building to see what had happened outside. Those who were listening to the Expounder became a minority, and I soon saw the futility of trying to concentrate. Finally abandoning my seat I made the trek up the balcony and through the antechamber. I asked the first person I recognized “What the heck is go on? What’s happening outside?”

“Haven’t a clue. I think some one go up on a platform and started talking.”

“Why is that so important?”

“That’s what we’re want to find out”

Once outside, I could see there was a mass of people gathered around a news platform. Someone was speaking in Silvian, which surprised me once I glimpsed his red robe. It was unusual for an iron to know the Silvian language. Swiftly I made my way into the crowd, to what seemed like a natural stopping point for my trek. I was unprepared for the shock that came over me as I heard the man speak.

“And they tell you that Politeia has fed you, and keeps you alive. But I say Politeia starves you, and only keeps you alive enough to serve it. They tell you that Politeia is the most perfect society on Earth. But have you ever been Outside? Who here has ever even met a foreigner? Who’s to say Politeia isn’t the worst society on Earth and we just can tell?”

“We’re only bronzes and silvers. We aren’t fit to observe the practices of other societies.”

“And who is fit?”

“The golds.”

“And who tells you that you aren’t fit and the golds are?”

"The golds."

"Well has it ever occurred to you that the golds tell you this because they might be hiding something from you." The crowd gasped at this heresy. "Who tells us that the Doctrine is the highest thinking on earth? The golds! That our Institutions are the most perfect on earth? The golds, the rulers! Think about it. If you were a ruler, wouldn't you want those you rule to think your rule was nearly perfect?"

"But Politeia gives us everything we need. It even give us beds to sleep on!"

"They give you one bed on which you sleep, the rest of your life, and leave it at that. But did you ever think that you might have a better bed than the one they give you?" The crowd awed and some gasped again. The idea had never occurred to anyone. "And like our beds, so our whole society. We take what we are given, without the thought that we could have something better, perhaps, if we each took our own initiative for these things. Decide when and from whom we get our furniture. Decide when, and what we eat."

"But we have the most efficient system for that already. We don't have to think about those things so we can concentrate on our duty to Politeia." I think it was a lesser cleric from the Palace who had spoken up.

"And how do we perform our duties to Politeia?"

"Why through the Agencies, of course."

"And who runs the Agencies, my friend?"

He hesitated. "The golds."

"And who tells you that our Institutions are so efficient?"

"Why would the golds concoct such an elaborate scheme of deception? That the golds would go through all that trouble for their own material benefit is absurd" No one had suggested they did yet, but the Junior Expounder knew where this was going, so he skipped a beat.

"I'm not saying they are, properly; the golds don't benefit much from this machine they operate, do they? They just hold the power, and make the decisions, but, you're right, they get the same rations of food as silvers and bronzes, and the same quality of beds."

"Right!" The Expounder crossed his arms in a fit of triumphalism.

"So then, I guess, the golds deceive themselves as much as they deceive others."

The Expounder didn't respond, but looked flabbergasted.

"It really isn't the golds fault, any more than it is the silvers or the bronzes. It's the whole system of things that keeps us from greater glory, the Institutions, I mean. The Institutions that keep us in bondage to each other from our births to our deaths. The very idea that all human social interaction, from conception to burial, can be regulated into perfection is absurd."

"So you think we are misinterpreting the Doctrine, then?"

"No, I have not come to perfect the Doctrine. I have come to cast it away!" The audience stood frigid at what they had just heard. There had been, several times in Politeian history, we were told, major disagreements about the Doctrine that had divided our fair city. But no one had ever, ever in our six thousand year history, dare purposed its discontinuation. That we knew of.

"Klinias S-112264?" some one asked my name, and may have tapped me on the shoulder, but I was too dazed by what I was seeing before me to realize it.

"Are you Klinias S-112264?"

"What? Oh yeah, I am. Do I have to identify?"

"No, the the..." his eyes went up to the person on the platform. "The verbal acknowledgement will be enough. I'm from the Bureau for the Propagation of the Species."

"Oh, of course. Is it time for the Expounding to be over? In all the commotion, I lost track of time."

"Yes, you're expected at our Facilities now. I'll take you there." His cool demeanor seemed to indicate disapproval of where he found me. As we made our way to the Facilities, I tried to explain myself.

"I'm not really taking this clown seriously. I mean he's an iron of all things, talking about the Doctrine?"

"It's all right. There were rumors going around at the Palace I was attending too. It is a little pathetic, isn't it, how people will come and watch a crazy man rave, just as they would a carriage crash."

"Exactly," I made some kind of hand gesture. "They're going to call out the P.I.M.F. and put him in the Asylum, right?"

"Well, I'm not the High Council, but I'd imagine that's what they would do. He said that the Doctrine was false, didn't he? That is the very definition of insanity."

"You'd know, I've never even been to the S-1 section before. The closest I ever get to medicine is when I see an iron getting cut harvesting wheat." I forced a small laugh, but the Bureausman seemed more perplexed than amused.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because..." I motioned my head furtively. "I'm an Agricultural Administrator, you know, work for the C.A.D. etc."

"My profile said you were a Residential Facility Administrator."

"Bbbfff, R.F.A.s" I made an unpleasant sound with my lips. "People become R.F.A.s when the golds realize they aren't good at anything else. Really, they're the lowest kind of silver."

"Yeah, I guess they are," he grimaced. "The Bureau often makes little oversights like that on subjects profiles. I hope you're not offended in anyway."

"Oh, not at all...uh"

“Melvinus”

“Melvinus!” I slapped my arm on his back.

“Melvinus S-090210”

“Melvinus S-090210, I’m not offended at all!” Actually I kind of was.

They had me take off my robes and bathe when I came to the Hall of Species Propagation. I must admit that, having little, to no knowledge of how Species Propagational Activities worked I was a bit timid. Nervous. Scared. After I left the shower room and put on some alternate garments for the process, two Bureausmen attended me and led me into a white painted room with a long chair like piece of furniture that they motioned that I sit on. “It’s called a ‘couch,’” one of the Bureausmen told me in a cautious, almost gentle tone. “Make your self at ease.” They turned to leave through the opening on the side of the room. “The doctor will be with you shortly.”

I sat down, making a little indenture in the cushion. A small square table was directly in front of me, and a metal chair sat haphazardly on the other end of it. My heart was racing. My hands rubbed each other spasmodically. It was funny, I thought, here in an environment so obviously created to induce calm, I was more nervous than ever. I was more nervous because I was in a place that was trying to make me calm. And if a place has to try to make you calm, you probably have reason to be nervous. “Ahh, habitats don’t mat-ter,” I finally said to myself. “It’s just the background. I could be anywhere, but if my mine is fixed on a bad subject, I’ll still be scared of it.” Bad subject. Maybe that wasn’t the right word for what was about to happen. Ominous. Yes, ominous is what was about to happen to me. But I didn’t know exactly what this ominous fate would be.

“Hello, Klinias.” The doctor had pulled back the curtains that hung in the opening and was making his way to the chair.

“Hello, doctor,” I tried my best to keep composed.

“Just call me Nativius. My official title is something like ‘Species Propagational Activities Over-sight Officer’ but most people just use the generic ‘doctor’...Dr. Nativius.”

“Nice to meet you, Dr. Nativius,”

“Oh, we’ve met,” he smiled humorously. “But most people who have been through SPA don’t remember the Oversi... the doctor who leads them through the process. It’s the drugs we use.”

“Excuse me, but I’ve never been summoned for SPA before. I’ve never even been to this part of the city.” His smile broadened.

“Well, it is a bit unusual for a participant to forget entirely, but you have been with us before.” He checked my profile real quick. “Yes, but it was when you were twenty one.”

“I don’t understand.” He sat down on the chair opposite me.

“During the SPA process the participant is drugged, both to induce the desired physical reaction, and to forget the substance of the experience. It’s not supposed to completely erase the memory that you ever went, though it isn’t unheard of.” He seemed to appreciate what I was going through. “You see we give males drugs so they only have vague, fragmentary recollections of what happened. This way it is difficult

to tell the experiences apart, and one would loose track of how many times one has been summoned. The High Council was afraid that male Citizens might misunderstand the delicacies of eugenics, and the number of times one has been summoned to SPA might become a kind of social marker. And for other reasons. The process is different for females, in their c..."

"Females. Yes, all I can remember about the process is that it involves a female and a male."

"Yes. I should get to the technical part for your purposes. You see, in pre-Foundational times..."

"You don't have to go into the preface, just tell me what I have to do." It was customary, whenever someone had to fulfill an obligation like this, for the officials to explain the larger purpose of it to you. Putting it in its right Doctrinal context.

"We're going to give you a drug. You'll smoke it with a pipe. It's called an aphrodisiac. Do you know what that is?" I shook my head. "An aphrodisiac releases natural impulses in your psycho-physical make-up; impulses that are otherwise suppressed by the fact that we live in a Doctrinal society, and because all the food we eat is processed with anti-aphrodisiacs. In fact, if you have ever skipped more than one meal at a time some elements of this impulse might pop up. An inexplicable attention to females etc."

"I think something like that happened the other day."

"Then you should be sure to eat a full meal at Lunch Hour. We'll see to that. But you must understand how all this fits in with the Institutions and the Doctrine. In pre-Foundational times any male and any female could, just by their own volition, engage in SPA and create progeny, just like that. We can only speculate how they were able to..."

"This is all real interesting, doctor, but could we please get back to the mechanics of what is about to happen." He rolled his head back in exasperation.

"Ahh, listen, do you understand why it is important that, in order to have a just and Doctrinal society, the creation of Citizens must be intelligently controlled?" His preface had become a catechism.

"Yes, I realize that,"

"And you understand that to have the best people, and thus, the best society, the selection of male and female progenitors must be made by society as a whole, and rationally planned so as to produce the proper kinds of future Citizens to fit Politeia's needs, and not overburden our resources?"

"Yes, I don't see any other logical way,"

"And you understand that the control of the means of production of Citizens by the most virtuous in our society is one of our most fundamental safeguards for the preservation of the Institutions; and that the creation of Citizens is part of your responsibility to the continuity of those Institutions, thus a duty to all the members of society, and a patriotic duty to Politeia itself?"

"Indeed, Politeia created me, educated me, fed me, and clothed me, the least I could do is contribute to its future population." I slipped into Book of Nomoi speech.

"Good, now that you understand why you are here, we can move on to the more technical aspects of what is about to happen."

My memory of what happened while I was engaging in SPA is by definition flimsy. I have relied on others to provide me with the details of the procedure, and have combined that with what I can remember of the experience. After smoking the pipe for about half an hour, I started to feel relaxed, my arms and legs became heavy, and I laid out on the couch; the feeling inside my head though, the only one that really mattered, was euphoric. I had never been so happy in my life. The light in the room seemed to dim as the temperature rose a little bit. All of a sudden two technicians lifted me up from the couch and removed the white robe that the Bureau had given me. Through my delirium I remember only being proud as they did this, "Aha," I don't remember if I actually said it or not "so that's it! He, he, I know why you turned the heat up. Because you knew you'd undress me didn't you. You don't want me to me cold! He, he do you?" Whilst I celebrated my small intellectual victory, the technicians were busy strapping my hands onto a harness that I hadn't realized was hanging from the wall.

"Hey, look guys," this I do remember vocalizing, as I toyed with the harness. "Am I holding up the building? Or, is the building holding up me? I'm straddling all Politeia, right here." I jerked the cord from side to side. The two technicians ignored my rantings, and pushed me forward toward one of the walls. I was dead weight hanging from the ceiling – the harness that was strapped to my hands above my head and was itself attached to a kind of pathway built into the ceiling. The two technicians gently pushed my body to the wall until the harness could go no further, then they disappeared. A second later the wall began to move in front of me, revealing a small window that stretched from my knees to my stomach. I tried to look down to see what was on the other side, but from my vantage point but could only see flesh color. Then the aphrodisiac must have kicked in. My lower extremities began to contract in odd ways, but my mind was filled with images that I did not summon. The content of these phantasms were queer – females in the shower room, an iron female I had once seen covered in mud, females lying on their beds, who were nude for some reason. Images I had seen before without the slightest thought now began to take on a strange new meaning. And my lower body -- I soon had an urge to move it... forward. Though I didn't quite understand why, but I had the feeling that this was some how related to the images, as if pushing my body forward in the presence of a female, was some instinctive command that my body gave my mind.

CHAPTER 3

“Eat,”

“What?”

“Eat!” I was lying somewhere in the Cafeteria and Icarus was holding a stick of broccoli to my mouth. Too dazed to really process my circumstance, I simply obeyed his command and parted my jaws.

“Good, the Bureausmen who brought you back said you needed to eat something as soon as you woke up. I usually disapprove of eating while it isn’t a meal hour, but if the doctor says you need to...”

“A doctor.... yeah, Dr. Nativius, I was just talking to him, about something...” I pulled my body up and surveyed my surroundings. It was the familiar Cafeteria all right, but its very emptiness made it eerily alien. The tables stood where they stood during meals, but they were silent now. The kitchen no longer had bronzes working it. The entrance to the Dormatorium showed the only signs of life. I definitely knew where I was, but...

“How did I get here?”

“I just said the Bureausmen brought you over.”

“Which Agency? What... hughh, did I hit my head on something and become unconscious?”

“Much less dramatic. You went through SPA.”

“SPA, that’s right!” I slapped my head; once that single word was uttered everything came back to me. “That’s right, this morning I was talking to Diana about it. I was mad because they scheduled for today, and then Melvinus found me by the platform, that crazy guy was talking...”

“Who’s Melvinus?”

“He was the Bureausmen...” by now I was standing. A more practical question came to mind. “What time is it?”

“2:30 in the afternoon,” Icarus grinned. “And you thought that SPA would take up all your free time. Just goes to show that you can perform your duties to Politeia, and still live a fulfilling...hey, come back!” I had started making my way out of the RF.

“Were do you think you’re going?!”

“I need to try and finish what I was reading Library. I couldn’t do that the last couple of weeks, and now this one is abbreviated. I have to get in what I can now!”

“Well at least take this food. And bring back the bowl.”

7:00. The day was over. As I layed out on my bed I reviewed the diverse events of the day in my head. "The Cafeteria. What an odd place to fall into reality." I grimaced. "Over the years I've woken up, probably, in every guest bed in Provincia. It used to disorient me when I was a pre-Citizen. All of a sudden not being in the STF. But seventeen years with CAD, you get used to it. The places in Provincia aren't even unfamiliar anymore. If not every bed, I have literally been in every guest room in Provincia. Dozens of times." I was letting my mind wonder. "Finally finished seventh part of that book on soil fertility. Would have been finished with it a long time ago if it was for the mission to Ben-Shetal." Megilus walked over.

"Klinias, they want you over at the Front Office. There's someone who needs to see you."

"Hi Megilus, I'll be over there in a minute. Did you see what happened at the Expounding..."

"We don't have time for conversation. You need to get to the Front Office now." I repressed a small laugh and smiled widely.

"What's gotten a hold of you, man? You sound like Icarus. I mean what – is the High Council waiting for me?" My smile melted away as I gazed in to his face and saw nothing of the expected mirth, but only stoicism. Now I was worried. "What's wrong?"

"Just come with me Klinias. I can't talk about it in here, but its important." Some of the humanity returned to the old soldiers face. If he can't talk about it, it must really be important.

We walked silently through the corridors of the RF. It was not uncommon, in Politeia, to be escorted somewhere by foot, and not let a word pass between escorter and subject, but not with Megilus. Even if I hadn't known him since pre-Citizenship, even if I hadn't known him at all, there would certainly have been lively conversation between him and me, between him and anyone, but not this time. This time there was only him and me and the silence that followed us as we made our way through the maze of halls of the Residential Facility. His almost melodramatic formality belied the fact that he knew something big was about to happen, thus I knew something big was about to happen, but neither of us knew what this big thing that was about to happen was.

"Remember what you said about the High Council?" Before I could answer he opened the door and my eyes were immediately drawn to the silver with the black stripe across his robe – the mark of a Servant of the High Council! I saluted,

"Hail Politeia!"

"Hail Politeia," the Servant turned to Megilus "is this the one I sent you for?"

"Yes, sir, if fact we know each other quite well,"

"He'll still have to identify. The High Council is ..."

"I am Klinias S-112263, sir, and am proud to be of service to the High Council." The Servant grimaced.

"Thank you, the High Council is very strict about protocol." He took a paper off of Icarus' desk. "You said 'S-112263'?"

"Yes, that is my number, sir."

“Good, then you are the one we are looking for. I am Titus S-051589. I will be escorting you to the Hall, for an audience with the High Council.” My eyes nearly popped out.

“Uh...may I ask why, sir, has the Council sent for me?”

“I couldn’t tell you even if I did know. But you have been summoned, and it is my job to see that you get there.”

“It will be a long walk all the way to the Grand Hall of the High Council. And its 7:30 at night, sir.”

“Yes, the High Council does apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. And we...they are sorry this had to be so late. But I’m sure you will understand the necessity when you have spoken with them. And you don’t have to worry about walking, the High Council has provided us with a carriage.” This sparked Megilus’ fancy.

“Is the situation urgent enough to merit special transportation, sir?”

“Oh, no, no, my boy the Council always uses carriages for business outside of Politeia Square.”

“Oh,”

“The Council always utilizes the quickest transportation so that it can carry out its duties most efficiently.” Titus turned to me. “Shall we go?”

Though I had been to Politeia Square times without number, I had never been inside the Grand Hall of the High Council itself before. After walking up a mundane flight of stairs, Titus opened the doorway with a key, one of only a very few doors in Politeia that needed one. Unlike the other Halls in Politeia, which literally were great hallways with a number of chamber entrances on each side, this door opened up to a giant lobby. The floor was tiled, which was also unique, and there were four columns of white marble, two on either side of the lobby, that seemed to escort you to the doorway on the other side of the lobby: the door way to the Chamber of the High Council.

“You may be interested to know,” Titus said with pride, “The Grand Hall is also a Residential Facility. The stairways to the apartments are there and there.” He pointed to the dark spaces between the middle two columns on the right and left side. I could only take his word, for the lobby was very poorly lit, and had a amber glow only when there wasn’t pitch darkness.

“Of course the High Council has common meals and a common sleep area, on the top floor. But being a High Councilor is demanding work, and they sometimes need to think over things in privacy.”

“I see.” I wasn’t really listening for I was too much in awe of the place to really care about whatever it was he was taking about. Preternaturally I slowly began to walk up the path that the columns were suggesting to me, until I came upon that majestic edifice that was the gateway to the Chamber.

“There aren’t any guards.”

“You mean like the ones for CAD, or the BUD? True, it is a little anti-ceremonial, but we need the PIMF more practically other places, and besides, we have all the security we need with the thick, mainly windowless, walls, double locked doors, the lobby. Mmmh... sometimes I wonder why we have any security at all. With the reverence held for this Institution, it is almost unthinkable that anyone would

want to disturb it.” I touched the oaken door now, just so I could. Titus walked up beside me “Well, it’s time.” He quickly thrust one of his arms to the center of the doorway.

“Hail Politeia,” the old man at the center of the front bench stood and gave the salute in a low, dignified voice.

“Hail Politeia,” the other thirty-six members of the Council rose and gave the same salute so reverently and softly, that you’d think it was a choir.

“Hail Politeia,” I stood straighter than I ever had before, straining my arms and fingers giving the salute, and made my voice sound as dignified as it ever had. I must have looked somewhat ridiculous. “May I say, sir, it an honor to have been invited to an audience with you, and that it is good to see that the formal salutations of Politeia are still strictly adhered to in this Chamber.”

“Our traditions not respected in the Chamber of Agricultural Disputes, Xenophon?” The chairmen turned slightly to his right, my left, and there was Xenophon, standing beside a desk before the High Council, apparently summoned just before I.

“Politeian parliamentary traditions and customs have the most careful attention paid them in our proceedings, sir. Sometimes, however, in the early morning...”

“There are no howevers when it comes to respecting the symbols and customs of your homeland, Xenophon. It’s not like saluting the emblem in the morning takes up personnel or resources; in those cases, we all have leeway.”

“Yes, sir. Of, course.... there’s really no excuse...for not showing decorum....” He looked down, defeatedly.

“Klinias, Xenophon, please take your seats” There was a vacant desk and chair next to Xenophons.

“There might not be a necessity for formal introductions,” the Chairmen smiled, looking slightly to his right, “but since it does not take up resources or personnel, I will take the liberty of informing all present that I am Archonos G-37-070646, Chairmen and Thirty-Seventh member of the High Council of Politeia. And before us today, are Xenophon G-103169, Chairmen of the Commission on Agricultural Disputes, and Klinias S-112263, Ad Hoc Administrator for Agricultural and Provincial Disputes, Citizens both. Now, the reason you two have been summoned here tonight is concerned with the incident that occurred this morning at the Beta Palace for the Expounding of the Doctrine,” My heart sank and a cold chill went down my spine. “We know that neither of you were involved in formenting that disturbance,” Whew! “The disruptive mans name is Joshua I-125399, and he has been agitating like this for quite some time now, though this was the first time he has brought his agitation into the city. We recognized this possibly before hand, so we arranged to have one of our finest administrators recalled early, so that he could be on hand in case such an event were to occur.” He paused. “And it has”

“Sir, forgive me, but...I spend half my life out in Provincia, and I’ve not had the slightest inkling of Anti-Doctrinal activity, of late.”

“No, you wouldn’t. Joshua is young, only 24, just graduated into Citizenship a few years ago. And he only started this....” Archonos made a rolling jester with his hand. “This immaturity about the fall of

last year. His activities had so far been limited to his assigned settlement, Ben-Nazariah. Your last few missions before Ben-Shetal were in the southern areas and the Northern Coast, were they not?"

"Indeed sir, my previous three missions were to Ben Atali, Ben-Ashkelon, and Ben-Hadath."

"Yes...yes, fortunately few knew of this heresy outside the extreme West. But now a quarter of the whole population knows. And those who weren't present at the episode this morning will soon be informed by those who were. We are particularly concerned about the iron community. The irons in that audience were from diverse settlement through out the valley. We fear this disease may spread across Provincia now."

"I see,"

Archonos turned to Xenophon, "My apologies, but we have decided it best to take direct action on this matter. Klinias will be sent out to Ben-Nazariah, under a Council Mandate, to ascertain the seriousness of the situation and report back to us."

"I will not protest, sir, only how...how long will our Administrator be gone?"

"He was never your Administrator, Xenophon. Silvers are assigned their Agencies by our discretion. And by our discretion, they can be removed. The mission will last a week to a month, depending on events." Archonos turned to me. "Further background material on this matter has already been prepared for you. It will be waiting on your bed in the RF. All dismissed."

CHAPTER 4

The sun was shining brightly on the carriage as we rode through Provincia. My goal, as always, was only the wellbeing of Politeia; but I couldn't be unaware that this was a huge step for my career. A High Council Mandate is rare, and reserved only for the most valued and capable Administrators. Conversely they are also only employed to handle the most critical and demanding missions. I knew that the mission to Ben-Nazariah would not be easy by any means. Still, I felt up to the challenge, and was never the less, very happy with how events were turning out. If I had only known what was being set in motion.

Fredrik and I had been traveling about three hours when I finally put down the background information on Joshua that the Council had given me. I felt that I had an encyclopedic knowledge of this mans whole life, that I could summon any facet of it at will to my mind. He was born in 5979 Post Foundation, and very early on displayed signs of remarkable intelligence and problem solving skills. The Guardians note that he could solve advanced puzzles and test without assistance while in the Primary Educational Level. This was quite an achievement as these exercises where designed for older children, and were considered to be difficult even for five year olds. At the Secondary Level he was placed with the Silvian speaking group and his penchant for mastering complex metal exercises grew. There is a report of one incident in which he was accidentally locked in a building while his class was on a field trip to another part of Politeia. Despite having little exposure to the city beyond the Primary and Secondary Educational Facilities, he managed to exit the building and scale several city blocks, eventually locating his classmates near the city walls. This happened when he was six.

At seven he was obviously, yet, considering recent events, inexplicably, determined to be a gold, and assigned to the Gamma Specialized Training Facility. There he took an early interest in Doctrinal and historical studies, becoming a star pupil in those fields and was certified by the ISD as having a correct understanding of the Doctrine at age ten, ahead of any of his classmates. In he preteen years he became almost obsessed with the Study of the Doctrine; the Guardians note that nearly all his time not taken up by class was devoted either to readings on Politeia and the Doctrine, or quietly meditating on those subjects. At the age of thirteen he was abruptly demoted to silver; the Secretariat of Education admitting an error in its classification. Little Joshua had exemplary discipline and academic records, but the Guardians were alarmed by some of the conclusions he was making philosophically. His transfer to silver was accompanied by more than the usual fatigue and stress that accompanies a transfer at that age. Joshua was a sedentary, reflective student and did not easily adjust to the more active, public-service oriented training of the silvers. His commitment to the Study of the Doctrine only hardened; he simply ignored his new instruction, participating only when absolutely necessary. His academic and behavior records deteriorated markedly, as he greeted his new position with little more than contempt and condescension.

Accordingly, the next year he was demoted to bronze, and at age fifteen to iron. For some reason or another, the agricultural life agreed with him more than his previous two classifications. Joshua worked diligently in the fields of Ben-Shetal, then Ben-Nazariah growing wheat and barley. The paper work on him was scarce for the last eight years or so; he had no important disciplinary problems and was far removed from any stimulus to his heretical pre-disposition. The only notes that his supervisors at the STF in Ben-Shetal and from the RFA in Ben-Nazariah made about him indicated that

he tended to avoid the other irons out in the field, and that he was remarkably silent and concentrated. He would often stay out in the fields well into the night, after most of the others had retired to bed. The other irons were always suspicious of him, both because of his bronze past, and his odd behavior. Satisfied with his work – he often had a superior output – his supervisors wrote off the eccentricity to Joshua's unique background, and didn't really think anything of it. But for the last six months a steady stream of paperwork had been produced concerning his sudden relapse into Anti-Doctrinal thinking and – gravely -- his promotion of Anti-Doctrinal attitudes among his peers.

"And, now, he's my problem" I sighed and laid back in my seat, contemplating. "Extraordinary story. Just shows how unrigid the Institutions can be at times. To go from one of the most promising golds down to the lowliest of irons in just five years." I shook my head. "What a waste. Well, the High Council doesn't give Mandates for simple affairs." I grimaced. "If he had kept to his former course, Joshua might have been on the High Council by now"

Not without a little smugness, I thought back to my arrival back at the RF after my audience with the High Council. It was passed the usual time to go to bed, but despite Icarus' most impassioned pleas a somewhat large knot of people had gathered by the entrance to the Dormitorium and in the Cafeteria to wait for my return. I wish I could say it was due to my popularity, but as it turned out, they were for the most part motivated by curiosity about my sudden departure, and mysterious destination. Megilus, for example, wanted to know what the inside of the Grand Chamber actually looked like, while Cassandra was interested in the talk about the agitator.

"I was so enraged when I heard him," she made her small hands into fists. "I wanted to kill him right then and there."

"Whoa, don't go that far, Cassandra," Megilus laughed. "Killings our job. And remember, people who reject the Doctrine are just misguided, not our enemies. The Book of Nomoi says it is our duty to help persuade our brethren back to the correct way of thinking, if they ever should stray."

"I suppose it does. But sprouting all that in public, questioning the Institutions, saying the Doctrine is wrong right in front of children? What kind of sadistic person could willingly do that to a youngsters mind?"

"I don't think it would do too much harm. I mean, they saw this man..."

"Joshua" I spoke up "his name is Joshua"

"Thanks, they see this Joshua for maybe five minutes, but they have the whole Secretariat of Education ministering to them how well right the Doctrinal way to live is for years...it won't have any real effect."

"What he was saying was the craziest thing I ever hear. Saying we might be better off if we all did what ever suits our fancy, everyone just trying to get by the best way they can. It was so absurd that he is a walking advertisement for the Doctrine."

"Well, I'm sure I'm going to have a lot of opportunities to discuss this in the coming weeks. As it is, I'm tired. Its been along day."

"Good night, Klinias," they spoke in unison.

"Good night all"

My sleep that night was generally sound, but for one very strange dream. I was laying in my bed in the RF, as usual, when a soft, amorphous, skin colored form came under my sheets. Instinctively I began rubbing it, and putting my lips on it as it expanded over my body. Gradually, it dawned on me that the shape was taking on a form of a person, a female. Realizing this, I made an effort to look at the figures face. It was Cassandra.

After five hours of travel we finally came upon the frontier settlement of Ben-Nazariah. To call it a settlement was rather grandiose, for it consisted merely of the knot of concrete buildings huddled around the place where the Central Road met the Western Gate. The buildings were as gray as ever, but in my mind they seem to take on the scarlet color of its citizens' robes. Possibly this impression was enhanced by the deep green of the Western Forest that rose up behind the town. The ridge starts to rise from the ground immediately at the gate, so those strange firs seemed to hug the settlement protectively, or to hold it in place authoritatively, depending on your point of view. Strange tales of what inhabited that forbidden forest were as old as anyone's childhood. The monsters on the edge of our map fade as one grows older, but still... I looked back the way we came. As far as I could see in any direction was the encompassing sea of yellows, greens, and red dots. The wheat and barley fields were in bloom, and the irons were out en masse attending them. At the very farthest of end of the yellow/green I saw the vague outline of the city of Politeia, violet for some reason. You can always see the Tower.

"We're here, Klinias"

"Thank you, Fredrik. I'm sorry that we had to go out again so soon, but you know I don't know what the HCs going to do," He paused and stared at me for a moment.

"Well, I don't mind it so much...I guess I just wish they would have told me about it at the Bureau for Urban Transport and Transmissile. Or maybe just send a messenger with me a few days ago, so I could have picked you up at Ben-Shetal, and save a whole lot traveling time."

"Well that's the BUTT for you," Out of the corner of my eye I saw a pink shape slowly advancing toward me. Knowing what that meant I strode over to the usual place. The shape began to take form as it advanced. Human form. It was the Patriarch of the Settlement; a white vest and white stripes on the arms of his other wise red robe endow-ing that simple dignity of one who had attained the highest office an iron could hold.

"Hail, Politeia" He saluted.

"Hail, Politeia" I saluted.

"Identify,"

"I am Klinias S-112263, Ad hoc Administrator for Agricultural and Provincial Disputes. Identify,"

"I am Nehemiah I-15-182312, Fifteenth Patriarch of the Settlement of Ben-Nazariah."

The identifications were purely procedural. We knew each other well.

"Ne-he-mi-ah" I stared intently at him.

"Kli-ni-as," he stared sharply back.

For a moment there was silence. It had me a long time since we last met, and neither of us had expected the other. In a moment, my lip began to curl upwards, and my face to relax as we walked closer the middle of the carriage port and I embraced my old friend with a laugh.

"Been a long time since I've been out here, you've seem to have done well for you self."

"Oh, well, when the last one died, they just couldn't find anyone better, that's all. You don't look like you've done too bad either; they don't hand out High Council mandates for milk runs."

"I don't see why they didn't just get the PIMF to throw this guy in the asylum, and let that be the end of it. Archonos is really using the kid gloves for this one." We walked into the administration building.

"You want some bread? Newly processed, you can't get any fresher" I took the warm loath that he handed me and broke in under my nose so I could inhale that aroma.

"Hhhmm, nothing like western extremity produce," I handed the other piece to Nehemiah and we both took seats.

"So," I took a bite "Who is this fellow giving you so much trouble they have to send the likes of me down here to help you." Nehemiah sat back and sighed.

"Ah, Joshua ... Joshua, Joshua...where do I begin? He was always kind of an oddball,"

"Yeah, I read something like that in the reports. Real loner. Kept his distance from the others."

"It was more than that. You see, Joshua is an alloy, he isn't a pure iron or any metal..... he's something the Institutions didn't take account of. Irons are the simple people, we are the one that think about what is in front of us, what we need to do, and are no overly concerned with why its there, or why we have to do something to it. It's best that we are put in this kind of work, because it suits us best. But Joshua....he was never like that."

"How so?"

"You can see it in his eyes. They are never looking at what they are pointed to, but past it. He notices the world about him....but, it isn't his universe, his be all and end all. Do you know what I'm trying to say?" Before I could answer that I hadn't, we heard shouts from outside.

"Gebt der carriegen disct ein portal!"

"Alshunt -was- khunti-no! Ash-misr-jumhuriat al-arab!"

"What the hell is going on!?" I yelled at the window at Fredrik, as he was arguing with two irons.

"I told them to carry our luggage to the Guest Room, and put the horses in the stall." Fredrik answered in hurried Argentinian. "But they won't because they are in the middle of transporting something else."

"Do you want me to handle this?"

"No, I'll take care of it, Nehemiah," I spoke to the porters in Ferrian.

"Ash-majilis-alshura-al-uzma-mandata!"

"Al-uzma-mailis-mandat?"

"Da" The porters immediately dropped what they were doing and respectfully took our baggage and the reins of the horses. I then told Fredrik to retire to the guest quarters until I was through, in Argentinian.

"Du, der haus von aussn gebt,"

"Irons and bronzes," Nehemiah observed, sitting crossed legged while meditating on the red juice in his cup "Why don't they ever get along?"

CHAPTER 5

Nehemiah and I conferenced for a little while discussing the basics of the problem at hand. Surprisingly Joshua had gained remarkably few adherents among the irons. His base of support was generally among the silvers and bronzes, a small population of whom permanently resides in most Provincial settlements. Especially disturbing was the influence that he was gaining among the PIMF garrison, whose stated mission was to maintain the institutions.

“Why is the High Council only alarmed that irons maybe susceptible to this kind of subversion? They benefit from the Institutions, from the intelligent control of natural and human resources just as equally as everybody else.”

“That is true, Klinias. But unfortunately the anti-Doctrinal impulse...the untrue perception that the Institutions are not just strikes a cord amongst some. It is typically those who unjust, who rightfully have been put in a more humble position by justice...they vindicate themselves by believing that justice is not just.”

“Yes, but the....” I searched for the right word “the more humble among equals, the irons aren’t exactly rallying to this movement. It is mainly the middle classes, those who would, it might be said, have the most to gain by the perpetuation of the Institutions.”

“Strange,” Nehemiah nodded while looking contemplatively away. “Like a prophet not known in his own country.”

“Well, I think I’ve gotten to know this problem well enough.” I stood up and triumphantly ate my last piece of bread. “I think its time we met him.”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

We found Joshua at a flat, uncultivated rising near the gate. He had gathered some of his followers around him, many of them older than their new teacher, and he was having a kind of interactive, lecture meeting.

“So are you saying we should neglect our duties to Politeia?”

“No, not at all, in fact understanding this should keep one from being lazy, not reinforce it.”

“How is that?”

“Because, once you understand the vanity of temporal engagements, we understand the vanity of trying to stay still. Just as one should no longer contrive for temporal things of commission, one should not strive for temporal things of omission as well. One conquers inertia, by understanding its vanity. Does anyone else have a ques-tion?” I volunteered.

“Why do you call the Doctrine of Politeia false?” He made an almost imperceptible smile.

“Tell me, sir, when were you born?”

“Before you,” a slight chuckle went through the crowd.

"Still, were you present at your birth, I mean in a conscientious, understanding way?"

"Of course not."

"No body is present at their own creation. People just enter the flow of the process unintelligently, and try to find out as much about the world around them. As with people, so with ideas. The Doctrine developed as just another part of the process, another attempt at man to explain the world around him. It is a part of the Process, created within it, thus it cannot explain it, any more than a fish could understand the ocean."

"You're changing the subject. I didn't ask how it was created, but why is it false?"

"The highest wisdom is to know what you do not know. We are all subject to the control of the higher power, the one who created the world, and set in motion the Process. We can not understand the Higher Power, anymore than our crop yields can understand us, and we can not understand the Process any more than the haystacks can understand their destiny. The main problem with the Doctrine is that it believes it is absolutely right."

"But we don't believe the Doctrine is perfect yet. They are still working on it at the ISD."

"The scholars and the Expounders still think that the Doctrine can be perfect, and that they are on the road to perfect knowledge, and thus, perfect existence. But no matter what road one takes the destination doesn't exist for us. So traveling in search of perfection is just as bad as thinking you are there." I decided to abandon my original line of questioning.

"What is this Higher Power you speak of? Is it you, is there a place I can find him?"

"I am not the Higher Power. The Higher Power is manifest in all things, because all things are what they are by the Higher Powers ordinance. It is everywhere generally but nowhere in particular. The birds have the air, the fish, the sea, but the Higher Power has no earthly home."

"So you say that everything is what it is because the Higher Power wants it to be?"

"Yes"

"Then doesn't that mean the Institutions and Politeia were put in place by the Higher Power?"

"Yes,"

"So thus, by your logic, we should have no right to break or change what this Higher Power has put in place, right?"

"Not necessarily,"

"How do you mean?"

"The Higher Power puts every thing in its place when it is right to be there. The sun arises in the morning, is places in the sky and sets. The moon likewise by night. The Higher Power sets things up and brings them down at the right time. Like the sun and moon, the Institutions of Politeia too, will set at the right to. For the Higher Power makes nothing permanent, especially the fruit of mans hand and mind" As I heard these words

slowly take form in Joshua's speech, any hint of amusement I had evaporated. This man was dangerous.

"I'm Klinias S-112263. I'm a Agricultural Administrator. The High Council sent me to..." I again searched for the correct word. "To deal with you."

"The High Council, concerning itself with me? I feel honored."

"Your spectacle yesterday at the Temple convinced them that it was time to take more effective action concerning your case. It's not even under CAD, the HC has taken over direct administration."

"Well that is comforting. If only the HC were more proactive in other matters, just cut through the bureaucracy, and solve one of the public problems that is their responsibility. It would have been more like them to throw my "case" to the ISD, Expound-erhood, PIMF, like how one throws a piece of meat at hungry dogs."

"No, no. You should be proud. You have pissed them off enough to forego all that, and be dealt with by just one person, me." He turned to his followers, most of whom were sitting in a half-circle around him.

"It's getting late, dusk. I know many of you have duties that you would want to perform before we go to bed. My throat is getting dry from speaking, and I'm sure our guest is weary from travel." His audience began to slowly get up, and formed little knots as they floated out into the fields and back to the village. Joshua went with them.

The following are excerpts from my report back to the High Council:

...the irons, predictably, were generally hostile to him. As is true in most Politean classes, the people there grow up with and live with the same basic coterie of people. Beginning at the earliest educational levels, friendships and acquaintances are maintained as people go up the specialization process together, creating a limited number of familiar people among irons of the same age groups. In Joshua's case, as a Silvian first, then a gold-designate, he had never known any of the people who were in this class and age group, except perhaps in nursery school....[After being demoted to iron] he intentionally remained aloof from his peers, never attempting to become a part of his new community. This is true even of those Ben-Nazarites who had been with him in the STF. But these attitudes only developed into actual hostility towards him since he began his sermonizing.

Joshua's Influence on the expatriate population: Joshua exploited several advantages in order to gain influence among the expatriates. For one thing they lacked the deeply held suspicions that the close nit iron community had of him. Furthermore, in a culturally desolate frontier town, Joshua was a well educated, intelligent person who had spent most of his life in metropolitan Politeia. He could relate to and converse with the other classes on subjects that were completely alien to most irons. Some had even known him earlier when he was in the higher classes. His intelligence, however, opened him up to ridicule as many found the sight of an iron farm worker speaking so authoritatively about such things amusing.

In fact, Joshua's heresy seems to have begun when bored PIMF troopers asked Joshua to lecture them about the Doctrine in order to patronize him. This started to become a regular entertainment for the urban community, as more and more of the other classes began to listen to him in their spare time (there was very little entertainment in the area). At some point it became more than a joke, and his audiences began to take him seriously, until the jester had become the king, and the silvers and bronzes of Ben-Nazariah were now followers of an iron. An iron who in most cases was years younger than them.

The silvers that I interviewed seemed not to mind the absurdity of taking Doctrinal lessons from someone of a lower level. To my surprise – perhaps not surprise -most had abandoned the concept of levels in accordance with Joshua's teaching. According to them neither the ISD nor the High Council nor any human agency could determine authoritatively "the nature of the universe" and thus no one was in a position to determine who was or was not capable of what understanding could be had (not even Joshua). Apparently, in Joshua's schema, the "Higher Power" directs all these things and implants what ones character will be in the person before he or she is born. Even if he acquires an aptitude or skill after birth it is still attributed to the "Higher Power" because it apparently directs all activity in the universe, and every action that takes place was conceived by it before it created the world. Thus all history could be thought of as the unfolding of a single "Process".

.....four general tendencies seemed to form in reaction to Joshua:

- there was a group of about 24 devotees who formed a kind of priesthood around Joshua, arranged his sermons, and were his close friends and inner circle
- those who had more or less converted them selves from the Doctrine and become Joshua's regular followers. It is difficult to determine at what point a follower made the "conversion" from the Doctrine to Joshuitism, for, as noted before Joshua himself is often opaque as to whether he wishes a full destruction of it, or a reform of it
- the casual observers, who seem to believe that Joshua makes good points and is worth listening to, but do not consider themselves followers.
- those who completely reject Joshua.

It should be noted, however, that there was significant overlap between these groups and they should be conceived of more as thought tendencies within the population rather than definite groups. However the differences are distinct enough to warrant consideration by the Council. The full test of loyalty to the Doctrine, or a definitive breach by his followers would come only with the next migration to Politeia for the Wednesday Expounding.

CHAPTER 6

We began preparing for the weekly trek to Politeia Tuesday evening, preparing earlier than the other settlements because of our distance. While the event was accompanied by the usual amount of enthusiasm by the irons - it was, after all their only chance to escape the drudgery of agricultural existence - as the date neared anxiety increased for the village leadership and myself. Despite the fact that it had been less than a week since I was commissioned, it had slowly become the unspoken consensus that the High Council would likely take direct action to interdict Joshua the next chance it got. All I personally knew as I rode in the caravan that was that I was to give my preliminary report to the chairman of the High Council before the Expounding started. Though theoretically I had a month to make my final recommendations, in my heart I knew that Joshua enjoying his last hours of liberty.

It was still dark when I awoke. The carriage had been slowing down for the last several minutes until Frederik eased it to a halting stop. I knew what this meant. Without any thought of danger, because I knew there was none, I unlocked the carriage door and leaped out. It was an awesome sight, even to those who have seen it many times. The caravans had arrived at the city Gates. For as far as one could see, the plains before the Front Gate were packed with rows upon rows of the faithful, huddled together in carriages, on mules, or on foot, and there were more arriving. In the distance one could make out the stream of lights to either side of the city -- the equally dense congregations for the north and south gates. Any attempt to navigate though the crowd in a carriage would be an exercise in futility.

As I made my way through the masses, I sensed that I was attracting much attention from the crowds, partly because of my robe, partly because of the great haste I was making to get to the Gate. While there was the minority of higher levels somewhere in the caravans, I was still a squirming blue speck trying to make his way through masses of red robes humanity. No doubt some resented that I wasn't going to wait like the rest of them.

The city wall was one great cement circle which rose gracefully from the earth and stood quietly for 65 feet into the air. The only interruption on the cements grey continuity were its three large oak wood doors. Once I was at the gate I lifted up an orange card that was the signal to the gateman, who was stationed at the top of the giant edifice, that I must be let through with out comment. A small sub door creaked open in the great oaken gate, small enough for just one man.

"Klinias S-112263?" They had an escort carriage waiting for me at the entrance. The High Council was not sparing any time.

"Yeah, I'm Klinias, you're my ride down to the HC, I presume?"

"Yes, we don't have any time for formalities. Do you have all your papers with you?"

"My report and everything is in this briefcase"

"Good. Please, get in the carriage."

We hurried pass the dark shapes of the Politean twilight, the thundering of hoofs and wheels our only companion. Arriving at Politeia Square precisely as the bright yellow circle peaked out from the Eastern Sea, I could detect a certain apprehension in the place. Though the architecture had not

changed a brick, the buildings themselves seemed to feel emotion. Nervous. Defensive. The Great Tower seemed to watch us expectantly. Politeia Square seemed like a giant snake coiling before an adversary; ready to fatally attack because it was mortally threatened.

The driver didn't speak but just stopped the carriage and opened my door.

"We've arrived now. You need to see the Chairman of the High Council."

"Just the Chairman? I thought..."

"No time for explanation, just follow me."

Before I knew it we were inside the great lobby, and my attendant, whose name I never even had a chance to ask, was leading me beyond the pale marble columns and amber glow into that dark ether where, I was once told, laid the entrance to the High Councils' private quarters. As we journeyed into the heart of the building only the area immediately ahead and behind us was illuminated by my attendants orange torch light; otherwise we were surrounded on all sides by pitch-blackness as we traveled up flight after flight of stairs, beginning anew at each landing. At some point I lost count of how many floors we had past, how many steps I had to go, and became a mere passenger as my unnamed attendant guided me through the silent darkness. Finally, I turned to go up the next flight and there was none. There was only a door; an outline of sharp, blue-green light that cut through the darkness.

My attendant turned to me, and indicated the knob. He reached out, and gently turned it. As soon as he opened the door, the whole dank visage became awash in a avalanche of turquoise light. Timidly, I stepped into the room and gave the formal salute.

"Hail, Politeia,"

Archonos' form was leaning casually at the edge of a wide window, looking out to sea. The surface of everything in the room seemed to have taken on a turquoise hue, even Archonos' vestments. A few white birds were perched on the ledge.

"It's funny. A bird sees so much of the world, but doesn't understand what he sees." Archonos seemed to be speaking more to himself rather than me. "This little fellow here, who knows all he has witnessed. So many different places...different people, a myriad of human drama" He extended his arm and the dove perched in his hand. "Sees so much more than any human alive could ever experience. And yet is dumb to it all. Thinking only of his food and his procreation"

I was still standing at attention; Archonos went on "When I first was selected to the High Council, they tried to give me a room on the other side of the Grand Hall. I could look out and see all of Politeia and Provincia, all as far as the Western Forest. But no. No. They call it the Western Forest or the Western Ridge, but what it really is a wall. A gigantic, green wall surrounding us. I never really realized that until I saw it from that vantage. So I insisted they give me the ocean side. You can literally gaze as far as your eye can see when you look out across the ocean." He looked wistfully out of the window. Then, almost for the first time, he seemed to acknowledge my presence.

"I'm sorry, have you been standing at attention all this time?"

"Yes, sir, I am Klinias S-112263, the High Council gave me a manda..."

"You don't have to go into all that. Take a seat here, please" he sat down on a wicker chair by the window, motioning me to sit in the one next to it.

"I have my first preliminary report on the conditions in Ben-Nazariah ready," I handed him a packet of papers which he sat down on a table.

"Thank you, I'll share this with the Council. But, you tell me, you've just been there, is Joshua intent on keeping to his heresy?"

"He gives every inclination that he will continue with it, sir"

"Emm, and you say he is imparting it to others?"

"Yes, but oddly, not to other irons, but to the bronzes and silvers that are stationed out there. Even the PIMF. Its all explained in my report."

Archonos stared gravely, not at me though, nor anything else in the room. Finally, he spoke "The situation, then, is more serious than I had thought. Joshua is becoming, if he has not already become, a danger to the general acceptance of the Doctrine, and thus a danger to the community at large. It would be foolish to keep him out in the open for much longer."

His gaze returned to the sea, and he started to meditate quietly. After he hadn't spoken or acknowledged me for nearly twenty minutes, I began to exit discreetly. I was almost to the door when he spoke, "Klinias?"

"Yes, Chairmen?" He turned his head toward me, and looked into my eyes.

"I want to thank you for your service in this case, Klinias. You have performed your duty to Politeia above and beyond what could normally be expected. Never even complaining about how much this affair has interrupted your life. You are an exemplar of the kind of man that the Doctrine calls upon us to be."

"That is a great compliment, sir, coming as it does from one whose own unswerving devotion to the welfare of Politeia is so renown." He smiled, at the time, I supposed, because of my flattery.

"Well, we all do what we must."

CHAPTER 7

Seven thirty in the morning and I was already tired. Who could blame me? It isn't every day you wake up before dawn, rush through crowds of pilgrims on foot, then hurry past all of metropolitan Politeia to conference with the Chairmen of the HC. Exhaustion combined with despair once I realized that I still had a full day ahead of me. And it was probably going to be a workday, too. Wouldn't be any point in going to the RF to get something to eat, by the time we would arrive Morning Meal hour would be almost over, anyway. Decided it was best to tell the carriage driver just to drop me off by the Beta Palace for the Expounding of the Doctrine. I had been part of this drama for so long, it seemed fitting I should be there at its conclusion.

What I saw as we neared the palace amazed me, yet didn't surprise me. Crowds of people had lined the streets in the vicinity of the Palace, gathered about the platform where Joshua had given his sermon a week ago. Few if any seemed to have taken their places inside of the Palace, as had been done on this day since time immemorial. The same force which had always silently guided people to the palace, now bade us congregate here. Whatever was about to transpire here had never happened before, and may well never happen again. I also noticed that clouds were beginning to march into the sky.

8:00 came and no body cared. People from all over Politeia and Provincia had come here to witness something extraordinary, and they were not going to leave until they saw it. 8:10. A small carriage escorted by fifteen men on foot turned a corner and journeyed through the crowd. I don't know if people knew who it was or not, but they let it in, whole reams of people making way for the carriage as it preceded through the multitudes, finally stopping below the News Platform. A buzz began to emanate from the crowd, as hundreds, thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, speculated on who was to appear whence the carriage doors opened and what would happen when someone did. The noise stopped abruptly as the driver started to pull the door ajar. A roar of reaction went up from the masses as Joshua appeared. Some yelled curses at him, others cried their blessing, most probably applauded the first act of a show.

Joshua didn't egg the crowds on but simply made a gracious wave as he made his way up the ramp and on to the platform.

"What have you come to here to see?"

"You!" someone in the crowd answered.

"What? A mere iron laborer, the humblest among Politean men?"

"We came to see one who speaks wisdom. We want to get wisdom from him!"

"You can no more come to a place or a man as you could go to a place to find a new body." He paused. "Within each of us lies the power to understand the Higher Power, and the Process. Those who do not are in jail cell, and do not realize that they have the key"

"Then how Joshua, how will we ever be able to understand it as you do?"

"Though deep meditation, and thought upon these things, you will find it, you are the ones who can. In that sense, the Kingdom of the Higher Power is within you."

"How do we know if we are ones who can or cannot understand the Higher Power, as you do?"

"You will know that you are one who can find the Kingdom of the Higher Power when you stop worrying about such things." A laugh went up from the crowd.

"Those who do not wish to find the High Power, who are too concentrated on things within the Process, will never find it. Yet there are those who do not seek the High Power, who have never even heard of it, and yet understand it already. It is best for them that they do have not heard of it."

While Joshua spoke, I spied a small commandercy of P.I.M.F. nearing the crowd, though few seemed to notice them. I could see one of the blue helmets of the silver infantry, it had a white stripe though its plume -- signifying that he was a lieutenant, the highest rank a silver could advance to in the Politeian military. Though I looked hard, I didn't see if Megalus was among them. The commander himself was clad in yellow. They seemed to bide their time, either waiting for the crowd to thin out, or for Joshua to make an incendiary remark, to make their move.

"And what is justice? The Book of Nomoi has it that justice is when everybody is in the right place, the one position that would fit him or her best. But I say that Justice is every one deciding how to live, and what his occupation will be for himself."

"But that could lead to people making the wrong decisions."

"It is their decision to make. Not for anybody to dictate. And further, the state should not decide when, or by which two progenitors, children should be born. But when a man and woman wish so, they should reproduce, and those two shall be responsible for the upbringing of the child!"

The crowd was awed by that anarchistic, insane proposition, and many of the hecklers started throwing rocks, only to be accosted by the Joshua's followers. By now the sky had become a dark gray, and sprinkles of rain fell on the assembled masses. That clear turquoise blue that had shown so bright in Archonsos' office was now completely eclipsed. The commander apparently decided now was the time to arrest Joshua. The soldiers held their long razors, torso-long axes, at attention, and they had little difficulty moving through the multitude, up to where Joshua was speaking.

"Joshua I-125399, you are under arrest for propagating anti-Doctrinal attitudes among the population." Another wave of reaction spread through the crowd, the ones shouting curses and blessing exchanging places and the ones there for spectacle applauding the show.

"Commander, I wish to inform you..." Joshua was broken off by a burst of thunder. One of his more ardent admirers took the opportunity to attack the PIMF, only to be whacked on the head by the bunt of a razor. The vituperation between factions in the audience grew louder and fistfights seemed to be breaking out across the morass of people. Joshua, at that moment, had the power have unleashed chaos across the gigantic gathering with but a word.

"Stop, Stop, all of you! I will go with the PIMF. I will gladly be arrested, and be tried like anyone else in our country, even if our country be making a false movement" In the turmoil the sound of such passivity and meekness was the most surprising thing the crowd could hear.

Those near the platform stood in awe of the sight of the man with such power, being taken away with such little resistance. It was truly a remarkable abdication. The squad put him in a carriage for protection and then hauled him off across the city to the holding cells. For the first miles of the journey crowds of Joshua's detractors ran behind the carriage, throwing eggs at it and yelling insults. But none was so adamant in his hatred to follow the carriage the length of its journey.

"The most important thing, gentlemen, is that we keep our wits about us," an official argued before the High Council "This mans treachery has come upon us so suddenly, his crimes so extraordinary, that the reactions that are stirred within our breast are ones of outrage, and indignity. And justly so. But we must be as firm with ourselves, as with others, and proceed calmly, as we would in any normal circumstance. The only way that we can assure justice to the people of Politeia, and to the perpetrators, is to allow this matter to be handled by the regular Politeian court system."

"Whilst I concur that we should not let our emotions get the better of us, I believe strongly, that the only way to properly execute this case is by delegating it to the Institute for the Study of the Doctrine. For, even though Joshuas' is a criminal offense, it is also a Doctrinal deviation..." Before any case goes to trial, or any matter of great public importance is dealt with in Politeia, it must first be assigned to the proper Agency by the High Council. In this case the High Expounderhood, the ISD, and the Politeian Judicial Commission were each claiming jurisdiction over Joshua's fate. I was summoned as a witness.

"While I have my utmost respect for my Fellow-Citizens from the Institute, and for the Judicial Commission, I wish the Exalted Councilors would not overlook the humble petition of the High Expounderhood. As is clearly stated in the Book of Nomoi 137:28-39 it is an ecclesiastical duty that the Doctrine be accepted through out the populus, and thus anyone attempting to disrupt us..."

"You are forgetting," another interrupted, "that the integrity of the Doctrine itself is the responsibility of the ISD," For some reason, the awe in which I held this Chamber was slowly diminishing.

"But this isn't a matter of the Doctrine itself, Joshua doesn't care about the Doctrine, he is spreading a new, wholly different, faith among the people"

"Well, that simply isn't true..."

I sat there at my desk unable to move for three, four, then (was it six?) hours. After awhile I stopped paying any real attention to all the rhetoric and debate that was circling around above my head. Occasionally I would be asked to give my expertise on some aspect of the case, only to see my answers tossed around the room like a tennis ball by the presenters.

"What I have always not quite understood," broken in Adm. Poseidon, Chief of the Politeian Fleet, and a High Council member, " Was Joshua attempting merely to advance his own theories or was his goal actually the replacement of the Doctrine? Perhaps, Administrator Klinias could enlighten us; he has more experience with the matter than any of us." It was a variation on the same question they had asked me a dozen times.

"He said he wanted to cast away the Doctrine, didn't he? I would say that's fairly conclusive."

The only person who seemed as interested in he proceeding as I was was the Chairmen. He sat motionless, resting his head upon his elbow, like myself. His eyes were fixed intently ahead of him, but I

do not know if he was seeing what he was looking at. Finally he said something that grabbed my attention.

"I believe we have had enough presentation to make our decision. I move that we adjourn for the day." His move was agreed upon by acclamation.

I stood up, finally, and began to pack away my papers into my brief case. As I was turning to leave, I said under my breath, "Damn, waste of time"

"You do not know how right you are" I turned around and realized that Archonos and I were the only ones left in the Chamber.

"I didn't mean to insult the Institutions, sir, just..."

"No, no. The case will be tried by the Politeian Judicial Commission. The other presenters never had a chance to convince us to do otherwise, and they knew it before we started the proceedings."

"If you already knew who was going to be assigned, then why did we just waste seven hours. Why did the other Agencies send representatives at all." I spoke more frankly than I had intended.

"It isn't so much a question of the case at hand, but the prestige of the Agencies. None want to let something go by default, lest they fall behind in the prestige among the bureaucracy. I'm sure, if it had any slight claim to jurisdiction, the Politean Fleet and the Transportation Agencies would have sent a representative."

"Well, judicial preliminaries must be carried out in accordance with the Institutions. And as the High Councilors are more in tune with the Doctrine, and are less influenced by material and human desires, they are the most fit to assigned judicial matters." Archonos nodded his head with a sigh and slowly, almost forcibly, walked out of the Chamber.

I had little company as I made my way up to the RF in the dusky Politean half-light. The spectators and partisans of the morning had dispersed, either from exhaustion or from having realized they could do something better with their Wednesday. The HC hadn't provided me with a carriage this time, so I pushed my body through the cement labyrinth of suburban Politeia, thinking only of the warm, soft bed that I would be my reward, if only I tortured myself a little bit further. The sun played beautifully on the elaborate Politean architecture, producing a wonderful display of light and shadow. I looked up towards that sun, as if in thanks for making my dismal odyssey a bit more pleasant. The orange disc was just dropping behind the Western Mountains, turning their usual vibrant green black.

"Klinias, Klinias, how are you feeling?"

"Hi, Cassandra. Afraid there's not much to report about Joshua, mainly procedural..."

"I'm not interested in Joshua or any of that, right now, I'm interested in you. Seven hours before the High Council can be kinda rough on someone. Thought ya could use a friendly shoulder," I looked down into her pretty eyes, my face muscles too tired to smile or look sullen. "I got some food for you, waiting in the cafeteria,"

I smiled. "How could I refuse?"

I felt a bit guilty at first; I was so determined to make the preserved salmon and bread before me disappear, that I hardly acknowledged that I was accompanied. But Cassandra seemed unperturbed; she probably realized that I had not eaten since Evening Meal Hour yesterday. Soon, I finally felt full enough to converse with her.

"The Western Borderlands are beautiful this time of year,"

"Oh, are they?"

"Yeah, everything's in bloom, the fields almost look like a rainbow when you look out across them. Ever been out there in the spring, Ben-Nazariah, Ben-Shetal..."

"No, I've never been out that far. But back when I was still in STF, we used to go up to Ben-Ashkelon at the beginning of each spring."

"Ahh, the beach. What were you studying up there?"

"Well, presumably, we were there to familiarize ourselves with the lifestyles of the irons, but, when you think about it, if you're goin' to be the Guardian of very young children, that kind of knowledge would be pretty irrelevant."

"Maybe if you were going to teach older kids?"

"Nah, we already knew we were going to be lower levels." she looked north a little wistfully, "But... haaa, that feelin' ya get when the wind is comin' in from the sea, blowing on you, the sun is comin' up, or goin' down, and your feet are buried in the surf...there is nothing like it."

"So you went every spring until you became a Citizen?"

"Eventually someone in our class brought it up with the Secretariat, about it not being relevant or efficient an' all. And, your right, they agreed with her, stopped lettin' us go. The Instructor who was taking us there was disciplined, and the trips stopped. Other than that, I don't think I've ever been out of the Grey City in my life"

"Do you ever wish you could go back?"

"Yes, I suppose. But I'm much more useful to the community here in metropolitan Politeia, than out doin' what I want in Ben-Ashkelon"

"Well, that's what separates us from the barbarians,"

After we finished chatting we disposed of our leftovers and walked down the corridors over to the Dormatorium. Inside that great vaulted hall, there was the usual light festivity that accompanied the silvers when they returned home from the day. The conversation and noise wasn't as loud as it is during more energetic times, but a considerable murmur hovered above us nonetheless. Most of the beds were occupied, but few were lying down and none were sleeping. As my comp-anion went to go join that group of girls who she usually spent this time with, I suddenly recalled the dream I had had when I last slept here.

"Cassandra," she pivoted, and turned me an impatient glance.

"Well....it's just..." how to explain it "nothing. Nothing important."

I felt nervous as I stepped out into the Judicial Commissions Auditorium the next day. I had been summoned there before innumerable times, and could go through the motions of the rituals of justice with hardly a thought; but I had never been involved in a case on such a serious charge, or that had so much public notoriety. I awoke at 6:30 in the morning, and immediately went to take a thorough shower. While I was doing that, I had arranged for the house bronzes to clean and iron my robes. I do not believe I had ever been conscience of my appearance for going before a Commission before. Never this much, at least. My pre-caution turned out to be well founded. Every time I would look up to the observation deck of the auditorium, which was at street level, there were always a few dozen people, who had somehow escaped their duties to come peer over the railing.

The Judicial Commission Auditorium was a vast circular depression in the midst of Politeia Square; the only way to access it was through the under-ground corridors that tied together the larger subterranean judicial complex. The only way these could be reached was through the stairwells inside the JCs above ground buildings. Looking from the street level, the trial area was, really, just a large open air hole, guarded only by stone railing. This way trials could be observed by the public easily, though rarely be able to interrupt them.

At 8:30 the nine Judicial Commissioners flowed dignifiedly in from the corridors to take their place of honor at the head of the court. After the customary Saluting of the Emblem, which, for some reason, Joshua obliged us, the pre-cedings began. The trial turned out to be a non-event.

The prosecutor, Anytas, gave a flowery but formal speech, outlining the background of the case and delineating the charges against the accused. Parts of his oration sounded suspiciously like my reports back to the HC. After he had finished his hour-long address the Chief Judicial Commissioner, Kronos G-092455, requested that Joshua give a rebuttal.

"I don't know about you, gentlemen, but I was carried away by my opponent's speech. Especially since much of it was true." He paused. The court waited for a few seconds expecting him to continue, but he didn't. Finally the Chief Judicial Commissioner asked him,

"Do you mean to say, that you are guilty of what you are accused of?"

"All I have ever done is search for the truth, as best as I could define it. I never set out to find one answer or another, but the rightful answer, and if the truth I find is in contradiction to the Doctrine, I cannot help that."

"But did you ever try to propagate it, make others believe this 'Truth' of yours, instead of the Doctrine?"

"No man can go inside another's head and change the way he thinks. If I exposit my findings and others believe them, then I am happy for them, but if they do not, even though I grieve..."

"Would you stop it with the cryptic answers? I will not allow you to make a martyr of yourself, by denying yourself justice. You will receive a fair trial for your crimes, whether you like it or not. Now, did you try to turn people away from the Doctrine, yes or no?"

"I cannot turn people to any way of thinking, just present the way to Truth as best I can find it, and others may decide to follow it or not." The Chief JC responded with an exasperated glare. Almost accidentally, he seemed to notice me out of the corner of his eye.

"You! Administrator Klinias S-112263. You have had the most experience working with this man. Tell us, in your opinion: did this man try to instill a non-Doctrinal belief system among the people?"

"Well, um, I think the characterization of myself as the most familiar is prob..."

"Just answer." I turned quickly to Joshua, who presented a curiously neutral continence.

"I believe...so. Yes. Despite what he says here, from the sermons he gave at the Palaces and the lectures he was conducting in Ben-Nazariah...I think they were obviously orchestrated by himself or his followers in order to gain adherents." My response seemed to kindle an idea inside one of the associate JCs mind.

"The key to understanding any ideology, or movement, is the action of its followers, the practical manifestation of ideas. Tell me, Joshua, did you set out, intentionally, to gain adherents to your way of thinking? And haven't you already arranged them into a kind of priest hood? Ultimately was it not your goal to set up a new or different community, based on your ideology in the same way that Politeia carries out the Doctrine?" Joshua's answer was surprisingly frank.

"When I was a gold designate, and my name then was Socrates, I sought ought disparately for truth, especially in the Doctrine. When some of my findings turned out not to be 'correct' in the eyes of the officials, they demoted me, successively to silver, bronze, and finally iron. But I never ceased to look for truth, even if all I had as a tool was my own mind. One day, some PIMF soldier's thought it would be amusing to listen to a lowly iron try to converse with them about the Doctrine, to patronize me. But they started to ask me to do this on a regular basis, and more and more people came to listen. And soon it was no longer a joke, as people arranged for me to speak before larger audiences, wishing to understand Truth like I did. So you might say my adherents found me."

The court was at first stunned by Joshua's sudden outburst of honesty and frank speaking, but soon recovered its senses.

"What about the other part of my question: did you try to arrange you followers into some kind of new community, in which to carry out your principles in the social sphere?"

"There is very little that I have said about social relations, all arrangements of which pass away in time. But there is much that I have said about inter-personal relations."

"Like what?"

"Like, if you see a man hurt on the side of the road, it would be best to try and help him,"

"Why bother? The Medical Authorities will be with him soon enough."

"That is not the point. The actual condition isn't the point. It is compassion, solidarity with others. Because you would know how it felt to be in that person's position, and wouldn't want it to happen to somebody else."

"So one must do all he can to make others happy?"

"No, that in itself is not the goal. The goal is to feel the others pain as you would have it. You would see that all men are comrades in the same struggle through life. Once that has happened, good deeds will follow naturally."

"This has all become off topic" reminded the Chief Judicial Commissioner, "if someone really wants to be helpful to others, he will do everything he can to support the Doctrine and its Institutions, the best, and most efficient way to secure happiness for everybody yet conceived of by man."

It went on like that for awhile. The main legal sticking point between the Commissioners, the prosecutor, and, occasionally myself, involved the legal definition of subversion of the Doctrine, and if this was intentional or not. Arcane legal knowledge was exchanged between the JCs and the prosecutor, and the Book of Nomoi and various former cases and precedents were passed around quite a bit.

"Whether he sought it or not, he now has a following, a base group of people who would do as he says on mere principle alone and that is - really - the greatest kind of power a person can have. What would prevent him from raising an army out of this group, to overthrow the Institutions and order society the way he'd have it done, with himself at the head of course?"

"But even though he has this power, bear in mind, he has never used the loyalty that his followers have for him for any personal benefit."

"You think he doesn't like having dozens of people fawning over him all the time, hanging on his every word? It is only a false humility. That is probably why he is trying to martyr himself, so that his posthumous reputation will be remembered forever. It all fuels his sick vanity."

Ultimately, it was decided that, whether intentionally or unintentionally at first, his disturbances at the Palace, and the informal solidification of his following were signs that he had started a movement to discredit the Doctrine among the people, and, thus, was a danger to the peoples' wellbeing. His punishment would be to have all his benefits from the community taken away from him until he recants. This included the hardship of forced fasting -- his food, after all, was a product of the community he was trying to harm. He would be kept in a cell for six days, then on the seventh -- so that the populus could see the justice of Politeia with their own eyes -- he would be chained and foisted into a public cage, all the while being lectured to by the Expounders to realize the truth of the Doctrine before he expires, and if he does he would be taken down and allowed to eat again. We were a merciful people that way.

For the six long days that it took before he was to he would publicly expire Joshua was the assumed first topic of conversation in all of Politeia, regardless of class. It seemed strongest the first couple of days, then subsided as the people got tired of hearing about it in the middle of the week, then slowly crept back up as we inched toward the final day. It was only when I spoke to Diana that I remembered what this season was supposed to be about.

"...can't eat that right now, I'm pregnant, you know" she casually mentioned while we were eating at Noon Meal Hour.

"Your pregnant Cassandra? Why'd you never tell me? I remember you said something about going through SPA, way back..."

"It was about three weeks ago. In fact I think I went through SPA the day that Joshua first started his disturbances,"

"The Doctrine, has it only been that long? It seems like we've been dealing with him for ever,"

"You were sent to Ben-Nazariah at about that time, so I guess that's why you're the last to know,"

"So, is this your first time?" Cassandra piped in.

"No, it isn't."

"What is it like, being pregnant?" Cassandra asked.

"Well, being sequestered in the Maternity Complex for the last three months isn't that bad; they keep you drugged most of the time, so you have no feeling of being bored, or idle. In fact your whole awareness of time becomes blurred. Its actually quite idyllic. And then, one day, you are rudely awakened."

"How?"

"All of a sudden, this crushing pain over takes you. It is a pain so searing, that no amount of drugs can dull it. And before you can understand what is going on, you're on a table, still feeling the pain, and you realize that there is all this blood, and flesh around you. You realize that its yours. Then your out cold. When you wake up, your back at the RF. By the Doctrine, what we women do for Politeia!"

"Well, at least your understanding you situation correctly. You understand that all you have to go through is for the common good" Some of the other women smirked.

"We'll see how enthusiastic you are about your civic duties when you break water,"

Until Joshua expired or recanted, I was still technically on loan to the High Council, which meant I was at their beck and call whenever a need for my expertise should arise. In practice, this meant that I could not return to C. A. D. business, but had to stay within the Grey City, just in case they needed me. They never did, until the last night, so I spent my free time as usefully as I could, in the Library, getting caught up on some of the reading that I had been unable to finish because of my recent commitments. Though I realized that all this was was a grave miscarriage of bureaucratic justice, I consoled myself by saying that the Community was making amends to me for all the Wednesdays I had missed lately on its behalf. I was about to retire back to the RF on the evening of the sixth day, when I was surprised by the appearance of an HC carriage at the front of the library.

"Klinias S-112263, you are wanted at the Hall of Detention."

"You haven't sent for me these past six days, and now the HC calls on me. Guess they wanted to use this opportunity at least once, eh?"

"There is no time to explain, Joshua will be starved to death by tomorrow noon. The Chairmen requested that you accompany him while he meets with Joshua tonight."

This was strange. Why would Archonos want to meet with Joshua on his last night on earth? Why still would he ask for me to accompany him, of all people? As the carriage rushed through Politiea's cement avenues, the dusky sky gradually took on a stark purple hue. By the time we had arrived at the Hall of Detention the heavens were a clear, crystal studded black plain, the slightest azure border cresting the Western Mountains. The Chairman was waiting for us at the Portico.

"Klinias, I'm glad you have arrived."

"I'm always happy to be of service to Politeia, sir. What seems to be the problem with Joshua tonight, is he about to recant?"

"Not yet. He is holding a sort of final gathering of his chief followers tonight. When they take their leave of him, I plan to speak with Joshua myself," "Will any of the other Exalted Councilors be present?"

"No, they are too familiar with this matter to be of any assistance,"

"Is this a practice outlined in the Book of Nomoi, or one of the Specialized Manuals of the Institutions?"

"No, nothing like that. I am here entirely of my own volition."

"Sir, in all due respect...why am I here?"

The Chairman ignored my last question and signaled to follow him pass the guards into the Hall of Detention. It was grimly dark inside the Hall. Unlike the HCs building, the Hall of Detention was a single, straight, on-going cavern, barred cells lining either side. Most cells were empty; a few held sleeping petty criminals. The Hall was lighted, however dimly, by small torches near by every other cell, so I needn't depend on my guide for light this time. We stopped near the end of the Hall, close enough to hear a small conclave of people speaking in a nearby cell, but far enough in the darkness to keep from being seen.

"Crito, I realize that my imprisonment, and death, will be unjust, but still I must endure them anyway, because I am a citizen of Politeia, and must follow its laws. I would be doing injustice to others if I escaped."

"But, Joshua, you said there was nothing in the world more precious than human life."

"That is true. But life, like any temporal state, is fleeting, and it is as vain to try to hold onto it, as it is vain to try to hold on to youth. Furthermore, there is life beyond death." Silence rang out through the dark hall. "Do you think that the consciousness, the person that you are, is merely an appendage of the body? That it will cease to exist once the finite collection of materials that comprises your physical existence passes away? No, it is much older, and will live much longer than ones body." Again, silence.

"Where will...your conscience, go after tomorrow, Joshua?"

"Well, Plato, I like to think that I will go to join the Higher Power, and be with him. I will not be at a 'place' as we define the word. And neither the Higher Power, nor myself will have an 'image'... we will be beyond that."

Joshua harangued his followers like this for an intermittently long time, though I had no way to know how long we hid there. I began to grow restless, waiting there in the darkness, but I dared not breathe a word for Archonos was listening intently upon every word that was said. Finally, Joshua's band of followers retired for the night, and made their way back to the front of the Hall, whilst the Chairmen and I hid in an empty cell, undetected. Once they were gone, and Joshua seemed to be putting in for the night, Archonos advanced upon his cell.

"Who's there?" Archonos stepped into the light of Joshua's lantern, followed by myself.

"Just a friend," Archonos sat down on a divan, just opposite Joshua.

"Some friend to have me executed."

"You are not being executed; you're being starved to death. You knew this was going to happen, if you kept on like this."

"A killing by commission, a killing by omission, it is the same result,"

"Joshua, embrace the Doctrine again, even if only in word. I'll reinstate you back to gold, maybe even put you in the ISD, and you can insinuate your beliefs there, but under a Doctrinal label."

"You know I could never do that. At the very least it would look suspicious."

"It would not be suspicious, considering your background. Will ruffle the feathers of the ISD officials, but I can manage it. It's happened before, you know, when people have had disputes over the Doctrine,"

"Never when they have gone so far from the Book of Nomoi as I have. I can not betray my conscience, or my followers."

"Joshua, don't you understand what is about to happen to you? It takes exactly seven days for a man to die of thirst and hunger, that is how we have trained the Politeian body. You already look like a popsicle stick. Joshua -- just recant and all of this will be over. Not only will you be out of a prison cell,

but you would no longer be an iron. You could go from being in here, to a life of ease. Why must you let your self die?" Archonos was shaking.

"Ease and hardship pass. Neither is eternal temporally or genuinely fulfilling, but the peace that I will have when I am with the Higher Power, the contentment I have even now..."

"Stop it, stop it! Would you please, please come back to your senses!" Archonos jumped up from his seat, and was standing above Joshua "You were a star student, the pride of Doctrinal Instruction, why do you insist on clinging to this babble! You had such a life ahead of you. Now you are going to throw it all, all, away! Why are you doing this to yourself, and to others?" Archonos was shaking Joshua now, and, perhaps it was the dim light, but Joshua and Archonos, when their faces were juxtaposed right next to each other, I noticed something I had never realized before. Joshua looked much like Archonos, only younger.

"Why do you..." Archonos embraced Joshua sadly, but harshly, and Joshua, not unsurprised, but calm, put his arm around his elders back. Through Archonos' tears, I heard, in a parched voice, "You were supposed to be so great...so great..." A moment later Archonos regained his composure, stood up, and announced

"Well, Klinias, we have done all we can to convince this man to change his mind. There is nothing further that can be accomplished here, tonight, please accompany me out of the Hall of Detention."

It was a strange trek through the blackness of the Hall. I led this time, and the Chairman followed behind a few feet. Not a word passed between us. We exited out onto the portico above the ramp, and again were standing in the cool Politeian night, instead of the humid interior. To my surprise, and relief, two other members of the High Council were present to meet us.

"Chairman Archonos, has Joshua recanted?" General-Secretary Herata asked

"No, he has not,"

"Then your entreaties failed, then?" The Chairman did not answer.

"I know this is not the right time to speak of this," Admiral Poseidon voiced gently, "but I believe this incident is good illustration of why we should reconsider our 19:1514 initiatives." The Chairman made a furtive nod.

"Yes, yes, it most certainly is. But we'll deal with that tomorrow," Seemingly as an afterthought, he turned to me "Thank you, Klinias, I ...I couldn't have gone through that alone."

"My pleasure sir,"

"You will be provided with a carriage back to the RF, get some sleep. Oh, and, needless to say, you can't tell anyone about tonight."

CHAPTER 9

I pried my eyes open, lying on my bed, and it was all I could think about. Today was to be the day. The day all Politeia hoped for and dreaded. By nightfall the awful anticipation would be over. I rolled out of bed and began to dress myself. I didn't say anything; nobody spoke to me. In fact the Dormatorium as a whole was abnormally quiet. Everyone was thinking the same thing, and knew that everyone else was too, but no words gave evidence of this reality.

I walked over to the Cafetarium and ate breakfast. Just processed waffles and fruit, but to my mind it was delicious, salve to an exhausted conscience. Thursday. I had a feeling a lot of the people in my RF would go to their regular duties; strive to make sure that everybody knew just how much they didn't care about what was happening. Icarus seemed almost relieved that it was about to happen - the sooner it began, the sooner it would cease. The whole thing had brought untold irregularities in schedules and roll calls and protocol.

I finished my food and stood up, without picking up my dishes, and began the slow, casual walk pass the other tables towards the exit of the RF. I felt the eyes on me. People watching a man get up and go to work. They all knew where I was going.

I had to walk the distance from the RF to Politeia Square. I didn't mind. The walk was good for me, took my mind off things; cleared my head. When I got to the Square I saw the edifice that the bronzes had built for it. A hard wood stepped platform, supporting the bars and frame of a simple iron cage. There was no roof, and not all the bars were as yet in place, waiting to be sealed only when he was inside. Of course, this would make it harder to get him out if he recanted but, they all agreed, there was very little chance of that anyway.

At first, I just stood in front of the edifice, along with some other officials whose duty it was to witness this. There was no conversation; there had been no co-ordination or assembly. It wasn't a group, but five people who had been summoned to be here, and who were going to perform their duty, if only by their grim determination. Before long, some others came, stood behind us. I could tell they were spectators, not observers. People who actually wanted to be here. Some got bored after a while and departed, others came and then went. The composition of the crowd was in continual flux, except for myself and the official ghouls.

Finally, we saw the detachment of PIMF advance, and an invisible wave of recognition and anticipation silently went through the crowd. It took me a moment to realize what was different about them. A small yellow circle on the right side of each helmet. The lieutenant had two white stripes in his plume. This was an honor guard. Someone from the High Council was coming to observe. I knew who it would be. Soon enough we heard an advancing noise from another direction, a larger column of PIMF. They marched behind and around him, not allowing the public to see.

Once these had made their way up to the edifice, the formation broke, following strict military protocol, and revealed their captive. I couldn't believe how much he had degenerated since last night; though, come to think of it, the light had exceedingly bad there, and now I was watching the forced starved man in the company of much more healthy specimens. His skin had paled markedly from its original hue, his ribs and some other bones were visible. The prisoner hadn't been chained, or harnessed in any way, owing, no doubt, that even if he did wish to escape, his current state would make it impossible.

Next to arrive was the Expounder. An aged old cleric was introduced by the PIMF captain. The brightly robed Expounder ascended to the platform and immediately, though vainly, began to beg the prisoner to recant his beliefs, and embrace the Doctrine again.

Then the lieutenant of the Honor Guard stepped in front of the edifice.

"The final expiration of one, Joshua I-125399 will now be commenced. Archonos, the Most Honorable Chairmen and Thirty-Seventh Member of the High Council, presiding," From out of a corridor on the right marched Archonos, escorted by the rest of his Honor Guard, including its yellow helmeted Captain. The Chairman mournfully, yet dignifiedly, strode to the head of the crowd and gave the customary "Hail Politeia" then stepped back to the side of the edifice and placed his eyes squarely on the prisoner.

A group of five brown figures appeared on the left, and the PIMF phalanx stepped aside to let them through. Bronze engineers. A PIMF man took the prisoner by the shoulder and placed him inside the cage. He was neither led nor forced into the cage; rather, the soldier seemed to place him there, like a toy. But he was alive. I could tell by the movements of his neck and chest, as his muscles sought desperately to breath. PIMF on each side then took his arms on each side, and chained them up above his head to the already existing bars, while the bronzes melted the bars in front of him to the frame of the cage. Their torches must have sucked some of the precious air from his breathing space. Finally, the brown forms moved off the platform, and all the preparations were done. All that was left now was to stand and watch.

It was one of the most terrible moments in my life. The most terrible, until recently. My fellow officials and I stood there and watched as the man set up before us slowly deteriorated. The ripples in his chest became more and more obvious as his body struggled to breath. We saw his mouth open, not to speak, which I doubted he was capable of, but reflexively to ensure more seconds of life. Always in the background was the murmur of the Expounder, repeating over and over the well known principles of the Doctrine, and imploring him to save his life by professing them.

The sun had to have been especially warm that day. The oppressive heat was almost a physical thing bearing down on us. It was bad enough for us, sweating in our robes, but for the prisoner, shackled there, naked but for the cloth around his waist, it meant he was sweating out more water, more life. It was agonizing to watch, but I dared not move my eyes from him. This was my assigned duty, and I was going to carry it out, just as the four other officials, and the PIMF, were carrying it out. And the spectators. I did not see them, but I felt their presence behind me. Came, either on their own time or escaping their duties, to actually watch for sickening curiosity. I hated them.

And then there was Archonos. It occurred to me that, of everyone there, he was the only one who came of his own free will not because of any morbid curiosity or vanity. For some reason I felt it would be appropriate if I glanced over at his face. His eyes were the widest of all; it was him who was staring at the bloody scene more interested, more intensely, then anybody else. Yet it wasn't his duty to observe this, and he did not find any enjoyment in it. Why, then, had he come to subject himself to this?

It was about twelve when it happened. None of us wanted to see it happen, but all eagerly anticipated it. His legs started to fall useless, and he was left dangling by his chained arms. Then his

stomach began to contract rapidly, more movement than we had seen before. And his ribs and neck began to palpitate, as he mustered all his breath, all his life, to one final act. He turned his head to his left, toward Archonos.

"Forgive yourself, father, you know not what you do," eyelids closed over pupils, and a head drooped forward. Joshua had died.